A Life To Celebrate

Avis Paulson

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Contents

Introduction	4
My Parents & Grandparents	9
Growing Up & Getting Married	33
Young Mother Raising Kids	53
Vegas & Graveyard Shifts	67
Joining The Church	85
My Tricia Lynn	91
My Sherri Rae	97
My Bruce Michael	101
Trips I Was Blessed To Take	107
Random Stuff, Laughter, and Elvis	123
My Memories Scrapbook	137

Introduction

The stories that follow are transcriptions of audio recordings. Therefore, they may not read as smoothly as if they were written rather than spoken.

You can listen to each story as you read by scanning the QR code at the top of the story. The code links to the original audio recording in StoryCorps. From the StoryCorps website:

"Since our founding in 2003, we've helped over 700,000 people across the country have meaningful conversations about their lives. All interviews are preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C."

So, remember as you read, that these stories were recorded not "written."

There is natural rambling as the storyteller recalls things. Imagine you are sitting on a porch listening to them tell you their stories over a cup of coffee.

While we have smoothed out hinderances to reading and corrected grammar and self-interruptions wherever they distract from the story, we have taken great care to not change details or facts. We

have kept intact the speaker's tone and unique wording as often as possible. Our goal in transcription is authenticity.

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Avis Baumgardt Family Tree

Avis Bergene Baumgardt
b.11 Dec 1942

William Adolph Baumgardt
b. 25 Aug 1900
d. 28 Jun 1989

William Julius Baumgardt

Bertha Stelter

Carley Delilah Pickel
b. 10 Nov 1911
d. 29 May 1998

Henry C. Pickel
Mar 1873
d. 14 Feb 1946

Bergene Oftedahl
b. 20 Feb 1887
d. 14 Aug 1966

Three Generations

My Parents & Grandparents

My grandma [Bergene Oftedahl] was the love of my life. She was so special to me. She was my godmother, and I am her namesake too—Bergene, my middle name. Avis Bergene.

Grandma came from the Oftedahl family, a large family, and they lived on a farm over by Pemberton, Minnesota. When she got married, Grandpa had a general store in Pemberton. Grandma did most of the work, because Grandpa spent his time visiting with everybody.

Grandma and Grandpa had three girls: Aunt Carmen, Carley Delilah—my mother, though they called her Delilah, never Carley—and Corrine. Carmen got sick when she was about twenty-two years old. She had multiple sclerosis, and my grandma took care of her for twenty-two years, up and down the steps. Grandma never complained, never raised her voice, never ran. She did walk a little faster if somebody was at the front door.

She lived in a beautiful stucco home in Mankato, Minnesota, at 417 North Broad Street. Grandma never drove, so we walked all over. When we went into Mankato on Friday nights, when the stores were open, I would beg to stay with her. Then on Sunday afternoon she would walk me to the bus station and send me home to Amboy on the Greyhound bus. It was probably ten or twelve miles. I can't imagine sending a six- or seven-year-old child on that bus nowadays.

I can remember her house exactly, everything the way it was. Her sheets were folded perfectly, ironed, and kept in her dining room drawers. She had a beautiful cupboard with glass between her dining room and her kitchen, where her Singer treadle sewing machine sat. Every time we went there, she would say, "Now be careful and don't get your fingers under there, because it'll hurt," when we played with the treadle part. Of course, we always got our fingers caught.

Grandma would go upstairs and take care of my Aunt Carmen. She dressed her beautifully and put makeup on her when Carmen couldn't do it herself. Then I would go up and lie in the bed with Carmen and listen to soap operas. Carmen never saw a TV. Nobody had any money, so they couldn't get her one when TVs first came out. She died in 1952, when I was ten years old.

Carmen was married, but I never found out if she married before she got sick or after. Her husband was a painter. He was a tall guy, and he would come home every day, walking in real fast through

Grandma's front door. They lived there with Grandma. He would lift us up and nuzzle us with his whiskers, and he would always take his teeth out and make us laugh. He was a good uncle. Of course, they never had children.

Grandma had her lady friends from Bethlehem Lutheran Church, with Pastor Farrell. We would walk to church, and the ladies would come to Grandma's house for circle. They all wore their nice dresses, and of course they all wore hats to the circle meeting. They all had coffee.

As soon as Grandma put that big white enamel pot on the stove and started stirring the egg in with the coffee, we knew we were going to get a treat. Cookies and cake would come out, or cookies and sandwiches, whatever they were having. Grandma was so proud of us.

Usually my cousin Sondra would stay there too. Grandma had a double bed off the dining room, with a folding screen so nobody could see that it was a bed, and that was her bedroom. All three of us slept in that bed. We weren't allowed to go upstairs to the bathroom during the night because Grandma rented out two rooms.

One roomer was from the railroad. His name was Mr. Minx, and he lived there. He never left. We always loved it when he was there, because we would go sit out on the porch and he would give us each a quarter or whatever he had. Then we got to buy a pint of ice cream over at Joseph's store on the corner. Grandma only had a small gas-

run refrigerator, with a little freezer place that was always frosted over and had to be defrosted. There was not room enough to keep ice cream in it.

The other roomer would be a salesman who maybe stayed there once a month, in a very small room—just enough room for a twin bed and a dresser. He would stay one night and then you'd never see him again.

Grandma's house was on Broad Street, and there was a lot of traffic. It still is one of the main streets. In the morning, after the work traffic had gone by, I'd see Grandma with a scarf wrapped around her head. Before she did any work, she always had on her pressed, starched dress and her big white apron. Her head was covered so she didn't get her hair dirty. She had real long hair, and I never saw it down except at night when she got ready for bed. Then she would undo her hair and her corset.

After the traffic passed, Grandma would carry pails of water out to the front porch. She would throw water on the porch and then sweep the dust off so it didn't come into her house. She had the most immaculate basement you've ever seen. My uncle being a painter, everything was white, with some gray or blue. It was really nice.

I loved helping Grandma around the house. I helped her do dishes and washing, and I always would hang her clothes up. She told me the neighbor lady always put her underwear in between the towels

and things, because she didn't want anybody to see her underpants on the line.

We had holidays at Grandma's too. She had dishes from Bavarian china. I think she said they were from Germany—it could have been Norway, I don't remember that part. She would have company and all of us there for a meal. I never heard her complain about anything.

Well, I take that back. My cousin Sondra and I, who just passed away this past year, would sing "The Lord's Prayer" for Grandma. At the end, when it came to that high note, we would always miss it or screech or something. Then we would all grumble and laugh. Grandma would say, "Oh my, that's just sinful that we laugh," but she was laughing too. She liked to hear us sing.

On New Year's Eve, we got to stay up after midnight because it was New Year's Eve. We got popcorn and 7UP, and Grandma would say, "Now don't tell your moms that I let you stay up till after midnight." We played cards, mostly rummy. We always played cards. She loved it too.

I clipped the hedges for her, and she told me not to tell my mom and dad that I held those clippers in my hands.

Grandma never went to a nursing home. She went to the hospital a couple of times, and then she just got sick. I had heard she had a

heart attack or a stroke, but my mom said no, she didn't. They never talked about things then. They never told us anything. It was all secret stuff.

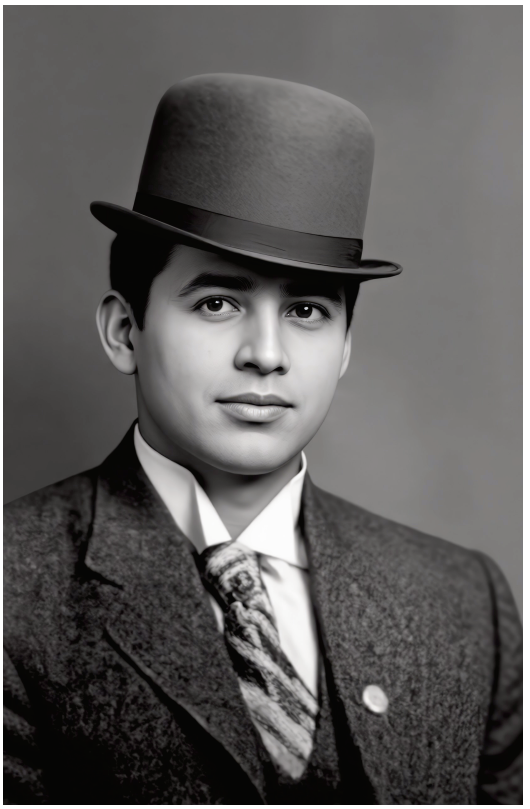
Grandma was seventy-nine when she died.

When Grandma and Grandpa moved from Pemberton to Mankato, Grandpa ran for clerk of court. He was a great fisherman. The story I was told is that he found pearls in shells in North Mankato, in the Mankato River, and he had them put into little screw-back earrings for Grandma. He gave those to her in 1909, when they got married. I have them now. I got them when my mother passed away, and I wear them, but I'm scared to wear them most of the time. I just wear them to church.

Grandma also had a watch that I got from my mother. It is a round watch you wear around your neck, and it has Grandma's maiden initials on it. Grandpa gave it to her in 1908, before they were married, because it has her maiden name initials—Bergene Oftedahl. That is how I remember the years.

Grandpa was a foxy dresser, I'll tell you. Quite the guy. He had a molded pipe and a great big black leather chair with a hassock. They

wanted to give me that chair when Grandma died, but it was so big, and I didn't live in a place big enough to have it.



Henry C Pickel

I didn't really know Grandpa, because I was so young. But I have pictures. One says "Henry" and "1909," and that is my grandma's writing. There he is with his pipe. The original picture belonged to Sondra, my cousin, Corrine's daughter. Corrine had eight children.

Now I'll tell you about my dad's mom and dad.

They did not know each other when they came over on the boat from Germany, which is the part that is Poland now. They met here and got married, and they had nine children. When Grandpa Baumgardt died, my dad had to quit school as a boy and help Grandma on the farm.

Bertha Stelter and William J Baumgardt

Grandma Baumgardt had a tom turkey she used for breeding, and the neighbor lady stole her tom turkey. My dad told me this years later. It is the only story I know about his mother. Grandma took

that neighbor lady to court, and she won the case because she knew her tom's markings. She got her tom turkey back.

That is the only story I have. Dad never talked about her cooking or baking or anything. They probably just survived. My dad was born in 1900, so this was in the 1800s when his parents came over and got married.

My parents were Bill and Delilah Baumgardt. My mother was a Pickel before she married. Daddy was eleven years older than Mom. He was born in 1900, and Mom was born in 1911.

Daddy owned a produce business in Amboy, Minnesota, when they got married. This was around the Depression years, and there were a number of women in little Amboy after my dad, because he was a single guy with his own business.

My mom and dad met because my dad had asked another gal to a dance. Her name was Avis, I believe, and she worked at the reception desk at St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota. My mother was attending nursing school there at the time. Avis asked Bill, my dad, if he minded if Delilah came along to the dance. They all danced, and my mom and dad danced to "The Lady in Red." Two months later they got married, and they were married sixty-five years.

My mother assisted the Mayo brothers in brain surgeries. I have the writings and papers. She was on their yacht. She helped the nuns get dressed in their garb. Years later, when she had her stroke and was in Rochester for a week, they all wanted to see her picture from those nursing days.

Mom and Dad were married for five years before they had any children. During that time, Mom went out on the road with Dr. Morgan, the doctor who brought me and my brothers into the world. She went with him on calls, and a lot of times he would just leave her there during the birth of the baby, and she would stay and

take care of whoever it was. She did that for five years and also worked over in Winnebago at the hospital.

Five years after they were married, they adopted my sister Gayle from the Lutheran Children's Home up in Minneapolis. Gayle is two years older than me. She was born in 1940, and I was born in 1942. Five years later, Mom and Dad had identical twin boys, born in 1947. Sadly, Ted passed away last year, shortly after my daughter passed away. He was seventy-seven. Those were my baby brothers.

Every Sunday, we were in Sunday school and church. Every Saturday, we had to have our bath and our hair washed and put in rollers, and our shoes polished. Of course, our dresses were always ironed. Everything was perfect. You never got to wear your Sunday clothes to school. You had to wait until the next year.

We didn't have sixteen pairs of shoes like they do now, and tennis shoes for everything. We had one pair of tennis shoes, and they were really shot by the time the school year was over. We had a winter coat. My mom would make Gayle and me wear slacks under our dresses, and when we got about a half block from school, we'd take them off because we didn't want to go into school with pants on under our dresses. Then we just froze to death.

Daddy had his business in Amboy until 1958, when they moved to Albert Lea, Minnesota. Dad had a poultry farm there. He got about

25,000 baby chicks a year, and I was the only child who helped him. The boys graduated and were gone. They didn't want anything to do with those chickens. My sister was gone before they even moved to Albert Lea. She graduated in 1958 and was out of there. She later told me, "No offense to you, but I'm not going to be coming back to Albert Lea for anything."

My kids said, "Well, thanks, Auntie Gayle."

Gayle lives in Utah and has lots of grandchildren. She had twenty-eight foster daughters and two biological daughters, and about forty-two grandchildren.

Back in Amboy, Dad had a popcorn stand. The stores were open on Saturday nights, and Amboy had about four hundred people then. Everybody would come to town on Saturday night. Afterward, Mom and Dad always had company. They would all come over for coffee. The women would smoke cigarettes and drink coffee while the men were in the living room. When the stores closed at nine, they all came over to our place and stayed until who knows when. It was a fun time.

When Dad had the poultry farm, he tried turkeys twice and said, "Never again." There was a storm, and a partition in the building picked up. I think about 1,200 turkeys were squished under the

middle of the building. Turkeys are dumb, and they just ran right under there. Dad never got turkeys again.

With the chickens, I helped him with everything. They were a day old when he got them. When they grew to about four pounds, they went to processing to be butchered or put into Tony's TV dinners for the airplanes, or whatever it was. When the semis came to load them, they had to shut the lights off and use blue lights, because chickens are colorblind, they told us. If they had regular light, the chickens would crowd and smother.

One night the semi drivers stopped to check on them, and there

were over a hundred chickens smothered. After everybody was gone, Dad and I spent the whole night there. He wrung their necks, got the feathers off, cut the legs off, and got them ready. I had to wash them and cut them up and put them in plastic bags. We had a sink there, a refrigerator and stove, and a heating stove.

Dad and I left there in the daylight the next morning and went around Albert Lea to his garden customers—the post office, the government center, his insurance man, the banker. Dad had a half-acre garden and gave away a lot of produce. There he was in his coveralls, and we had been up all night, selling those chickens for a dollar and a quarter apiece. People would ask if we would take a dollar. My dad would be turning over in his grave now, knowing they're about eight dollars a pound fresh.

When I helped load the chickens, I carried twelve at a time, six in each hand, by one leg.

The last load Dad had, he was seventy-seven years old. He had started working when he was in eighth grade and had only an eighth-grade education. But believe me, he knew what he was doing. He had a financial man, Mr. Frisbe, who came from Mankato into Daddy's business in Amboy and did Dad's investments.

Dad's billfold was always a big old leather thing that was falling apart, but it was loaded with money all the time. He would have me

go to the bank across the street, kitty-corner, and take the bag over there. I'd put the money up on that marble counter. It was all marble in that little bank, pretty fancy. My girlfriend's dad was the president of the bank, and they had a new three-bedroom rambler. They were rich, you know. But my dad had a lot more money than any of them, I tell you.

He told my husband and my brother-in-law that when they moved to Albert Lea in 1958, he had $100,000 cash. He didn't get a Social Security number until he was living there, so Mom only got about a hundred a month, and he got about two hundred when he started paying in. Women didn't know diddly-squat about the money then.

One time when Dad was in the nursing home, I went down to see him. I went every day. He was crying, and I said, "Daddy, what's wrong?"

He said, "I'm just worried about your mom. Does she have enough food?"

In his mind, he was worried about Mom not having enough. He was about eighty then. He was eighty-seven when he died.

We did get him a little black-and-white TV for his room, and he was so excited. When my Tasia was born, about forty years ago now, she would run down the hall to him, "Bumpa, Bumpa, Bumpa," and they would play Go Fish. He had Parkinson's, and she would say, "Be

patient, Grandpa. Be patient, Bumpa, be patient," because she thought he was getting excited.

Then Trevor was born. We have a picture of Daddy with him, and Trevor was only a couple weeks old. At least we got that picture.

We had a guest book in Dad's room, and I think that is a really good idea for older people. I told my friend Dirty Harry to put one in his mother's room at St. John's. She had Alzheimer's and didn't remember things, and I said, "When you're not here, it would be nice to know if people were visiting your mother." We liked knowing.

My mom was a smart little cookie. She sewed all our sunsuits and pajamas, and she made them a couple sizes too big so we could wear them a long time. She always wanted me to iron and clean the bathroom because I was the fussiest kid and did such a good job. My sister never wanted to get out of bed to help her. That's the truth. Gayle would have all kinds of candy wrappers under her bed. She ate candy all the time.

Everybody in the neighborhood came to Delilah Baumgardt because she was a nurse. No matter if she had been out of nursing school for fifty years, she was still a nurse. They always called my mom for help when their kids were sick.

A lady across the street was a war bride. She came from England

with her Army husband after the war. She had at least five kids, and Audrey would come over crying, "I'm pregnant again." Mom would comfort her. When Audrey's folks came over on the Queen Mary from England, they were just thrilled with my mom and dad and how good they had been to their daughter.

I babysat for Audrey's kids. George, her husband, never said much when he got home except stumbled a little up the steps. One night, I had three boys there—Mac, Dean, and John, my buddies. John and Mac are both deceased now. Dean lives in Arizona. We heard Audrey and George coming onto the front porch, and if George had been sober, he probably would have seen them. The boys ran out the back door, and Mac got hung up on the wire clothesline by his neck. It's funny it didn't kill him. Of course, I wasn't supposed to have three boys there. Oh, brother.

Mom helped with the Red Cross and the bloodmobiles too. I have her pins, her uniform, and her books. I've given some things to St. Mary's in Rochester, and I am going to give one of her uniforms and some reunion books to the Albert Lea museum if they would like them. I was going to give them to my granddaughter, but my girlfriend from Florida, originally from Amboy, said, "Why do you want to give that to your granddaughter? It's just going to hang there. Give it to the museum in Albert Lea. Your mother and dad had many years there, and she should have her story."

Mom helped dress the nuns in all those black wool garbs. I can remember those nuns because my Aunt Carmen was in St. Joseph's in Mankato. Grandma's house was near the hospitals—Emanuel Hospital was there, and St. Joseph's was on the next block. I don't know why Carmen was in St. Joseph's then. I was not twelve years old yet, and at that time you had to be twelve to go into the hospital, but they let me go in because I took care of Aunt Carmen. I got her ginger ale and Kleenex and everything. She was pretty helpless by then, and she was so beautiful.

Mom was also a wonderful cook. Everybody wanted to come to Delilah and Bill's for chicken—Daddy's fresh chickens. Mom fixed the best chicken. She would brown it all and then put it in the roaster and into the oven, and it wasn't mushy soft. It was half crispy. I don't know how she did it, because I tried and tried, and hers was just the best.

I learned to make gravy from Mom. One time when Mom was gone to Mankato shopping and didn't get home in time for supper, I fixed supper for Daddy. Gayle and I were making pork chops, and of course I had to make gravy. I said to Daddy, "Well, how was it?"

He said, "Well, it's very good, but it's a little thick. You gotta use more liquid."

Well, it was really thick. Now every time I make pork chop gravy, I think of Daddy.

My son-in-law Wayne never ate anything like meat and potatoes and gravy growing up. Roxy never made that. It was mostly hot dogs and cold meat, he said. With five kids, she just didn't cook, and she still doesn't on holidays. Everybody brings everything, even the turkey. But Wayne loved my pork chop gravy, I'll tell you.

Mom made the best bread and rolls too. She made pineapple rolls, and I've never seen anybody else have them. They were like cinnamon rolls, only with crushed pineapple. She would make a glaze thickened with cornstarch and put that on the rolls. We would come home from school, and my girlfriend loved to come stay at our house because we always had homemade soup, meat and potatoes, and homemade rolls. Her mother was the postmaster, and she never got that kind of food growing up.

When Mom got older, it became harder for her. One time we were camping out at Hickory Hills with Patricia, Wayne, and the baby, and we said we would come over. When we got there, Mom was crying by the sink. I said, "What's the matter?"

She said, "I just can't do this anymore."

She still had Daddy at home then. He wanted to go to the bathroom,

and he was not happy that Mom didn't come in. It was me instead, and he said, "Where's your mother?"

Mom had a stroke later and went to Rochester. She came back from that. By the time I got to the hospital, she had her motions and speech back. They had wanted to take her by helicopter, but it was too foggy, so they took her by ambulance. My son-in-law took me over, and it was about four in the morning when I got there.

Because Mom had trained at St. Mary's, she had a number from when she was in nursing school, and that was the same number she had all her life. They had a heck of a time finding her number because she had hardly ever been in the hospital except to have me and the boys. They were looking for her number from way back in the 1930s.

While she was in Rochester, people found out who she was. A couple of old nurses or nuns were walking the halls during the day from where the retired nuns lived. Sherri and I were there all the time. They wanted to see Mom's nursing picture, so Sherri brought it over. Teams of doctors came in, and the whole room would be filled with students and doctors because they wanted to see Delilah's picture.

Later, I got a phone call just as I was leaving to go to a movie. It was about nine o'clock, and it was my mother on the phone. We had put in an extra phone for her. I got out there, and she was laying on the

floor by the couch. Her phone was down there, and she had had a stroke. I called the ambulance.

At the hospital in Albert Lea, they called me even though Mom had said she didn't want to bother me. I got up there, and my daughter came too. Mom said she was hungry, so they brought her oatmeal and toast. She was sitting up in bed and was just going to take a bite of oatmeal when she died.

They called a code blue even though she had strict instructions not to. They charged us four hundred dollars for that. Mom had worked so hard on getting those instructions done. She was so proud of herself for doing that when she was eighty-five. She was almost eighty-seven when she passed.

Both Mom and Dad had wonderful services. We fed over 250 people at Mom's funeral. She had been active in church, making quilts and everything, and everybody knew Delilah. Everybody knew Daddy too, though he didn't talk much after he retired. He was tired.

There are always sad stories too. My brother and his wife couldn't have children, but they adopted two beautiful children. Paul was one of two Minnesotans picked to be in the Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City when he was in high school because he was an

excellent trumpet player. He played at Grandpa's funeral, and now he is a big mucky-muck [director] in a high school in Phoenix, Arizona, in the band.

I would just like to thank everyone for listening to my stories about my parents and my grandparents. I am one of the blessed people in this world who had good parents, great grandmas, and aunties. I think about it nowadays, the way things are, and how we had such fun. Even my children and grandchildren got to be with my parents and have wonderful times. They remember Grandpa Bill and Grandma Lyla.

My great-granddaughter is named after my mother. Lyla Clare. Mom's name was Carley Delilah. My Sherri, who passed away, always said if she ever had a little girl, she was going to name her Carley. Sherri did have a baby [Dalton] when she was forty-two, and he is six foot five now and a wonderful man.

So, thank you, Lord.

Growing Up & Getting Married

I'll start with my sister, Gayle. Mom and Dad had been married five years when they adopted her from up in the Cities, from the Lutheran Children's Home. Two years later they had me, and five years after that they had identical twin boys. Dad was forty-seven then.

I was born in Mankato, Minnesota, in 1942, and my brothers were born in Winnebago in 1947. Their names are Tedd Monroe and Todd William, and they are identical. Most people couldn't tell them apart.

We had a typical Beaver Cleaver home. We had to practice piano, we had to get our schoolwork done, and we always had our teachers over for dinner once during the school year. That was the thing to do then.

Dad would come home from work and play with us on the living room floor while Mom was finishing up dinner. He would lie down and close his eyes and pretend he was sleeping, though I think he just laid down there so he could rest, because he was an older dad

and tired from running his business. We would walk around him, and he was the cat and we were the mice. We'd walk real slow around him, and then he'd go, "Rawr!" and jump out and get us. That was our game before bed. He's the one who played with us the most. Mom never played games with us much. She sat and read.

We had piano lessons. Mom took us to Garden City, then to Winnebago, then out to Amboy in the country—different places when we had to change teachers. We always had to practice at least half our time right after school, and then we had to go back and finish the rest later on. Gayle played the saxophone and I played the clarinet, so we had to practice those too. We hated it, but that's what we did.

For holidays, we'd either go to Mankato to my grandma's or stay at our house, and Grandma would come with Aunt Carmen. We had a fake fireplace made out of cardboard. It had a little tin fan thing that you plugged in, and then it would look like fire was going in the fireplace. I don't know what ever happened to it.

One year I asked for a switchboard, because I wanted to be a telephone operator when I grew up. I wish I had saved it, but I gave it to one of the kids I babysat for. It had the phones, the dial, and the plug-ins and everything. There were two phones that went into our extra bedroom, and my girlfriends would come over and we'd play like we were in a doctor's office, making appointments.

Gayle liked fancy dolls. She has a collection now, years later. I liked baby dolls, and I even took mine to church with me when I got a new one.

Saturdays were the day to get ready for Sunday. We had our hair done, our baths taken, and our shoes polished. On Sunday, we always went to Sunday school first. We might get a quarter a week, and we had to give at least a nickel to Sunday school and a dime to church. Then we had the rest to blow on ourselves. For fifteen cents, you could buy a pack of gum and two candy bars, or a candy bar and a bottle of pop. We had penny candy then. I don't think they even have any candy like that now.

One year I got ice skates. We always got one or two presents—one from our folks and one from Santa. Another time I got a Bible for my birthday, and I was really disappointed. I thought, "A Bible?" I still have that zippered Bible.

My girlfriend Sue and I would walk down to the skating rink, then hurry into the warming house about 8:30 or quarter to nine because we had to be home before the whistle was done blowing at nine o'clock. We had a whistle at seven in the morning, noon, six o'clock for supper, and nine o'clock at night. We had nine long blocks to run home from the skating rink down by the school.

We walked to school. My mother never started the car for us in the

winter. She wasn't going out in that. So I'd try to hook a ride with a neighbor man I babysat for. I'd casually watch from the porch, and when he turned the corner, I'd go out there slowly. When his kids got in the car, I got a ride.

When my sister was in high school, her boyfriend's dad owned the Ford garage with all the new cars. When he came to pick her up for games or anything—because I played in the band and she was a cheerleader, and he was a basketball star—she would never ask if I could ride along. She'd get in the car and he'd say, "Would your sister like a ride?" And she'd say, "Oh yeah, I guess so." She was something else.

The boys were very sheltered. Daddy put up a snow fence in the backyard in Amboy, on a dead-end street in a town of four hundred people, so they wouldn't get hurt or anything. They had to play inside that fence. Daddy had a big garden out there too.

We had to mow the lawn with a push mower—no motor, just push. I always wanted to do the front yard because it was skimpier from the trees, but the backyard was really hard to get through. It was thick in there.

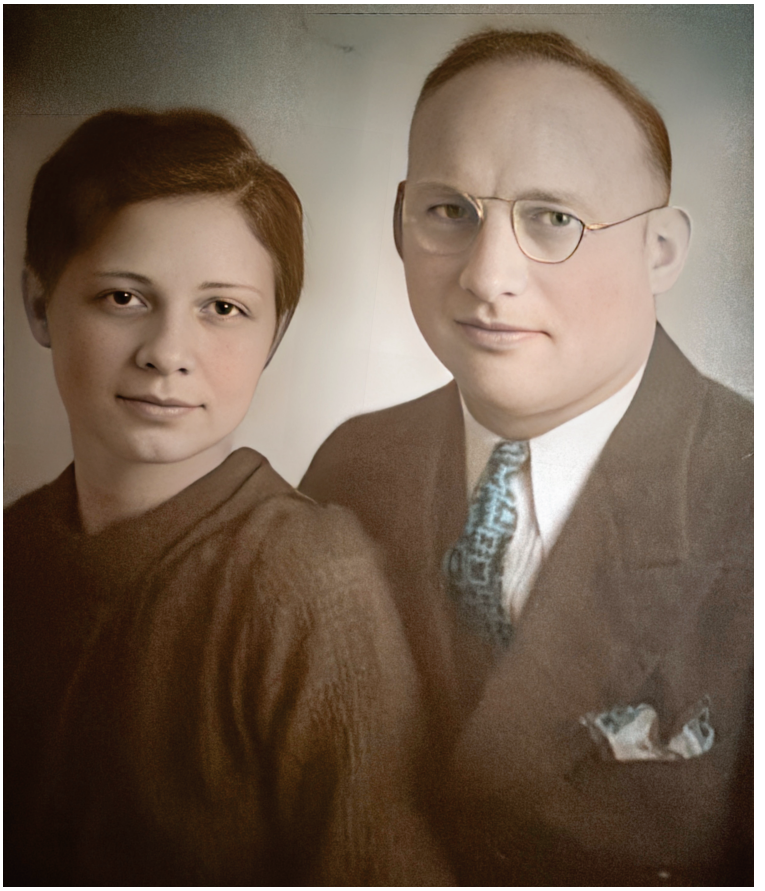
Daddy had a produce business in Amboy. He bought lamb's wool,

sold sorghum and things for the farmers, and bought eggs. I got to candle eggs. If I wanted any money for a pop or anything, I had to sweep the floor, make egg cases, candle eggs, or fill the pop machine.

Candling eggs meant Daddy had a little booth with a black curtain and a light. You stood behind it and looked at the eggs to see if they were double-yolkers or if they had any blood spots. If they did, you didn't put them in the case. We had to get the eggs ready for the big truck to come and get them.

When Daddy got chickens ready, they'd come from places like Tony Downs in St. James, where they processed TV dinners for airlines and everything. They were good then.

On Saturday nights the stores were open, and Dad made popcorn. He had the best popcorn and sold it there, because all his buddies would come in and hang out at his business. It was called Baumgardt Produce. He had bought that business before he and Mom got married, after he had worked at the creamery up in St. Paul when he was young and single. He bought it before the Depression, in Amboy, and that's what he was doing when he and Mom got married.



They were married in 1935 and lived in the apartment upstairs over the business. There was no running water or toilet or anything. When they adopted Gayle, they had to move out of there, because they couldn't have her until they were away from that—away from the no running water, the chicken feathers, the feed, the lamb's wool, and all that.

So they bought our home, which was like a mansion. I look at it now, and we had one of the nicest homes there was.

They got Gayle when she was eight months old, and when they brought her home, the furnace had gone out. They happened to have a space heater, so Mom sat in the bathroom with Gayle while Dad and whoever else fixed the furnace and got it going. The first day they got home with her, the furnace was out.

Gayle & Avis

We had a really nice home, but we were always taught: do not touch the cistern. It was right outside our back door, covered with a big round piece of wood and a great big rock on top. That's where we would have drowned if we had fallen in. It held the rainwater Mom

used for rinsing clothes and things. It came through the pump downstairs in the basement.

We only had wringer washers then. My mother never had an automatic washer. She lived to be eighty-seven, but she never had one. I had a wringer washer for eighteen years myself. I liked it, because I could wash clothes and hang them up, which I loved doing. Then the kids had to take their own clothes down, fold them, and put them away. You didn't have sixteen loads a day like they do now, with kids changing clothes five times a day. I didn't have that.

Tedd and Todd were always real shy, but very scholastic. They were always on the A honor roll, and later earned master's degrees. They were very talented and very good in school. My dad only had an eighth-grade education. My mother had four years of nurse's training at St. Mary's, and she assisted the Mayo brothers in surgeries from about 1930 to 1933. She worked with the nuns at St. Mary's

Hospital, the old marble building, I call it. God, it was all marble and dark in there. I couldn't go in there.

Back then, you couldn't go into hospitals until you were twelve. But when I stayed with my grandma in Mankato and Aunt Carmen was in the hospital, they let me go in even though I was only maybe eight, nine, or ten. They allowed me to go because I could help take care of Aunt Carmen and get her the pop she liked. I can't remember the name of it, but it was the only one she drank.

When I was in school in Amboy, it was a very small school, maybe two hundred in the whole school. It's torn down now. I liked history then, and I love history now, but I didn't like the way they taught it. Looking back, it was more dates than stories. I wanted to know what went on, why we had the war, how it ended, and all of that. I like to know the stories behind everything.

I also liked being in band. Anytime they had anything at school, my parents always came. I took tap dancing and baton twirling, and we were in a lot of programs. My great-aunt and her husband came from Pemberton and picked up my grandma in Mankato on the way. They always came to our programs in Amboy. It was a big deal. They didn't have kids, so they always came.

We had band concerts, and the school would have family night too. You could bring baked goods for the cake walk. You can't do that

now. Now you have to buy the baked goods. You can't bake things and take them to school.

We had small classes. My class had twenty-eight in it, and all these years later, only two have passed. That's pretty good. Polio was the big scare then. They came out with the vaccine, and we had to eat a sugar cube that had it in it. Billy, in my class, got polio. He was in an iron lung and everything, and he was always crippled after that.

Years later, when my girlfriend and I would go back to town, we'd always go over and visit Billy and sing to him.

In the summers, there was a girl who stayed with her grandma. Her family owned the drugstore and the grocery store, and the grandma lived upstairs. We got to have the apartment behind her in the summer, and of course that was fun. There was a back stairway and a front stairway, and we dumped a lot of boys in that tub.

At night, our cop—he was my friend's dad—would sit at the end of the street. We'd move garbage cans around in front of my dad's place and the bank and everything. Then we'd sing in our baby doll pajamas in the middle of the street:

"We are the Amboy girls,

We wear our hair in curls.

We wear the tightest skirts,

We are the biggest flirts.

And when we kiss the boys,

We make the loudest noise,

Ta-ra-ra-boom-dee-ay…"

We kept busy. There were apple trees across the street from where I lived, in an empty lot, and we'd eat green apples until we did get sick. Our mothers would say, "You're going to get sick. You're going to get diarrhea." And we'd eat those apples anyway.

We played football with the boys in Jill's backyard. Her mother would say, "You girls get off the ground with your dresses on!" When we had to stop playing regular football because she thought girls shouldn't be playing that, we started playing touch football instead.

I got to go home from school and watch American Bandstand with Dick Clark. Most of the girls in my class were from farms, and when they got off the bus it was late and they had to get the cows in from the field. We thought it was a big deal when we got to go out on the bus and help bring the cows in or let them out in the morning. But I got to go home and watch Bandstand, and I learned the slide and all

those dances. Then I would show the teacher, and she would teach them in gym class.

I was in GAA, Girls' Athletics, and I made twenty-two points in one basketball game. I was the highest scorer. Back then, you couldn't go onto the other half of the gym. The forwards and guards were separated, and I was always a forward. It was a lot of fun, even if we had ugly gym suits.

When I went to confirmation on Saturdays, Leslie Sonnabend always had a crush on me. He was always trying to hold my hand under the table, right there with our German minister, who was very strict. We were scared of him.

On May Day, we always had baskets. I'd get May baskets from Dean

and Mac and Frank and all of them. I got a lot of May baskets. I suppose I was ten maybe. They didn't do that when we got older, but on May Day, they did.

My kids gave me May baskets, and my grandchildren did too when they were younger, because we always did that. A lot of things people don't do now, just for fun. They're on their phones.

We played in the woods too. We'd pile up leaves and make rooms and pretend it was our house. Now John is gone, and Mac is gone. It's Dean and me and Sue left. Only three of us left out of that bunch.

My first crush was really Jimmy Phillips. He delivered the Mankato Free Press, and he had a dog that ran with him and a wagon. I'd go with him on his paper route because I had such a crush on him. Then there was Perry Pierce too, a cute little curly-haired guy. I think that was my first kiss, and it scared me.

When I babysat, Sue would come over sometimes. One night we smoked one of the man's cigars because they didn't have cigarettes. We were sicker than dogs. We turned green, actually. We also used to go up in the old barn behind Sue's house and take her mother's Lucky Strikes. We thought we had to smoke the whole pack so she wouldn't know, and we got very sick. I'm surprised we smoked when

we got older, but I haven't smoked for forty years, not since I got my first grandchild.

When I babysat out in the country, I was always scared. One night a drunk man came in the back. He thought he still lived there. His name was Deacon Schwartz. He was a bachelor, and some people had bought his house. Where he went, I don't know—maybe to one room somewhere. He had never married.

I was sleeping on the couch, and the kids were sleeping. We didn't lock doors then, and Mom and Dad had to get in. If there was a lock, it was just a hook lock on the screen door. I looked up, and there he was, stumbling through the front porch and into the dining room. I was petrified. I stayed real still. He looked around, and then he left. I guess he realized he was in the wrong place. He didn't hurt anything.

Another time I babysat three darling little girls out in the country. Their cousin is Cindy Crawford; her mother was one of the Hemingway girls, five beautiful daughters from Winnebago, Minnesota.

I also babysat for Mary next door. Her grandparents were the undertakers in Winnebago. I'd stay overnight there, and I remember her dad would come in late. They always stayed right to the end, and Edsel would be pretty well snockered. He'd come in and check to see that we were covered, and I could smell the alcohol. You never lose that smell.

When I babysat Mary's cousins out in the country, my mother told me, "You have to check on them every half hour." So I'd go upstairs and make sure they were covered. I was petrified. It was an old house with creaky steps, out in the country with nobody around. No phones, no television—just the radio, with hillbilly music from the Grand Ole Opry after midnight, and static. It was like when the TV went to snow at midnight after they played the National Anthem.

One night I came downstairs and saw a great big set of eyes in the dining room window looking at me. It was right behind their dining table, outside. I froze. I was so scared.

When the parents came home, I found out it was Les Kienholz's horses. He had a mink farm, but he also had horses, and they had gotten out. Those were the eyes I saw in the window. So that was my experience with babysitting. I was petrified.

The kids' grandpa, Cecil, was the butter maker in Amboy. They delivered butter and cream and milk to our house, and in the summer, Mike—the kids' dad—would deliver too. If I had friends over, my cousins and that, and we were sleeping on the porch floor as girls, he'd bring the milk in the morning and give me a kiss. Oh boy.

Mike had moved to Amboy from Granada, or somewhere around

there. When I first met him at basketball games in another town, he would always pull my ponytail. Always pestering me. I hated him. I couldn't stand him. He'd sit with Frank Reynolds, one of my buddies, and then I got to like him. We dated, and he became Mike Lutz —Michael Wayne Lutz. He was a little bit older than me.

Our English teacher would tell us to pay attention because we'd be lip-reading across the room in English class. Oh dear.

A couple of years later, we became pregnant with our first baby, Tricia Lynn. The pastors and our parents decided that we should get married. There are some stories in between there, but I'm not going to go into that. They wanted me to have an abortion and everything.

Anyway, we got married. They chopped off my hair and gave me a real curly perm because they said married women didn't have long hair. I wore a navy blue box suit for the wedding.

Grandma and Grandpa Lutz came over. She was a very fine lady. They loved us so much and were always so happy when Mickey and Avis would come to the farm by Granada to visit them and stay for the weekend. Grandma and Grandpa Lutz, and Uncle Lowell—oh boy.

Mike and I were married for ten years. After some rocky times, we went our separate ways. He was in a nursing home in Fairmont for a

couple of years, and he passed away about a month ago. This is 2026, so he passed away in February, I think.

We had three children. Tricia was born January 19, 1959. Sherri Rae was born June 28, 1960, about sixteen months later. Bruce was born two years after Sherri, on September 21, 1962, when we lived on 16th Street in our new home.

The kids were raised pretty much in Albert Lea. We moved around a lot. Their dad had a number of jobs. He had a good job at the Kroger egg plant when Bruce was born, and he worked part-time at Holley City Service, the little gas station across from the old KATE radio there on the corner.

We lived on 2nd Avenue for a while, and then when Sherri was three months old, we moved to Wells to the turkey farm. That was a real nice house in the country. Then we moved to Mapleton for the fall harvest, and that was with a real creepy guy. Oh, he was creepy. Sherri was probably three, four, five months old then, up to a year.

Then we moved back to Albert Lea and lived in a couple different places. We had an apartment behind Sanderson's garage, upstairs in an old realtor's office. It was like a place full of old ladies, and there were about twenty-five big wooden steps to climb. It was a two-bedroom. The bathroom was so small I had to put one kid at a time in

the bathtub, then sit down on the toilet so I could shut the door to give them their bath. That apartment was $42.50 a month.

Then we moved over on Euclid Avenue, across from Freeborn Foods. Those houses are pretty much torn down now. I couldn't even hang my clothes out, because the powdered milk and all that crappy stuff from Freeborn Foods would get into them, and that's what my clothes would smell like when I took them off the line. I didn't have a dryer. I had a wringer washer, and I had one for eighteen years.

There were just two bedrooms there, both upstairs. The kids all slept in one room. Oh, I tell you.

Then I started working at Green Lea Golf Course, and that was the year we got divorced, in 1967. A big tornado went through around the time I went out and applied for that job. I worked with Ernie Manuel, who had a canvas business in town. His parents were killed out in Garden Villa, across from the Y. That was a bad storm.

That brings us up to the year we got divorced. Mike didn't live in town. I stayed, and Grandpa Bill bought us a house on Pearl Street. I didn't know for years that Grandpa had bought it. I don't know where I thought it came from, but it was a duplex across from Trinity Lutheran, a very nice older house.

There was an apartment upstairs, and we had a variety of people live

up there. One lady would get so drunk with her boyfriend at the Zoo bar on the weekend that she'd take two steps up and come back three or four and fall down. My bedroom was right there by the back door. Oh, more fun.

We had one gal who lived up there, and she was on drugs. She had a little two-year-old, Paula, and a little boy, Jeremy. She never took care of them. She was always on drugs or something. My kids would tell me, "Mom, the baby's crying, the baby's crying," and I'd go upstairs and get him. I'd change him, feed him, give him a bath, and take clothes out of my cedar chest—my kids' old clothes—to put him in something clean. Then I'd get Paula and feed her too.

One time I went up and little Paula was on top of the refrigerator. She had climbed up on the counter and was trying to get something to eat. Another time she was in the crib with Jeremy, who was only about a month old, trying to give him a bottle that had curdled because he'd been crying, and their mother was passed out.

I tried to teach her how to wash diapers by hand, but she would hang them wet on the clothes rack without washing them out first. My girlfriend wanted to take the children as foster children, but her husband said no. Finally they called welfare, and welfare came and took the babies away from her.

Thank goodness.

Young Mother Raising Kids

Tricia Lynn was born January 19, 1959, at the Winnebago Hospital, in that small town. She was just a beautiful baby. Dr. Halverson was there, and Irene Poole, my mother's friend, was one of my nurses. She had been a nurse there in 1930, and she was still a nurse there in 1959.

Tricia was a good baby. The only time I ever had her to the doctor was when she was about a year and a half. She cried and cried and cried, and I took her in, and she had an ear infection. I never hardly had to take my kids to the doctor, I guess. We didn't have a car, so we didn't go anywhere, and we didn't have a phone. Oh dear. But she was a good baby. She'd take her morning nap and her afternoon nap, and then I would dust.

Then she got a sister sixteen months later, Sherri Rae. Sherri was born in Winnebago, Minnesota, also. We went from Albert Lea to Winnebago, and we got to the doctor's office at 10:10. I was just ready to sit down in the waiting room, and the doctor said, "Take her to the hospital." At 11:07, Sherri was born. So I just made it.

It was hot and blazing, and of course there was no air conditioning. They gave me a big terrycloth robe to put on. Oh, it was hot in there. Sherri had real beautiful dark caramel skin and dark hair, much different than Tricia. Tricia was blond-haired and blue-eyed, with skin like mine, just white.

Sherri was also a very good baby, and I hadn't gotten ready for her. I had clothes from my big baby shower, but they were not washed and ready. So I had to take them out of the cedar chest and wash them by hand to get something for her to wear.

I remember when I was getting some of Sherri's things ready from Tricia's little dresser—the one Mom had for the boys—I heard this noise. I moved the clothes, and there was a nest of baby mice in there. I grabbed Tricia and ran to the egg building where their dad was working, crying and everything. He thought something had happened to Tricia.

I said, "There's baby mice in our dresser drawers."

He came over and said, "I thought something was really wrong."

I said, "Well, it is."

He was used to seeing rats and mice and things in the building, but I

would have probably died back then if I had seen a rat. He got rid of them, but we had a lot of mice in that house.

We were living in a remodeled schoolhouse when the girls were born, and it was very nice. Their two great-grandpas, Grandpa Smith and Grandpa Lutz, came over every day from Welcome and Granada and worked on that house. They got it all ready for us to move in—painting, making a big bedroom, closets, a little utility room, all of it.

But they didn't put any steel wool around the pipes, and we lived in front of a corn bin, so you can see why we had many visitors at night. Mike would just get the mousetrap set, and it would go off again.

We did have a TV there, because the man we worked for, Loren Kruger, owned a TV repair shop in town by the Eagles. It was black and white, of course, but we were happy to have it. When we left there, we didn't even have a TV. I remember when we went and bought one, and we were so proud of it. It was a nice big black-and-white TV, because of course that was all we could afford. But it was our TV. Oh brother, I tell you.

Bruce came along two years after Sherri. By that time, we had bought a house. I was pregnant with Bruce when we moved out to 617 Sixteenth Street in Albert Lea, by Jobs Incorporated. There were

no buildings or businesses out there then. It was all farmland and corn and whatever—clay mostly.

We moved into a three-bedroom rambler with one bath, of course, and no garage. The man who owned it was a single man, a bachelor, and it was one of the last houses he had built out there that he wanted to sell. I think the price was $16,500, but we paid $10,400 for it. The payment was $65 a month, and that was what their dad made in a week at Kruger's egg plant—$65 a week, with good benefits. That was a good job to have. They moved out of town, though, so that ended that. I think they're still open in the East.

Here came Bruce, and boy, that was really exciting. Of course I stayed home and took care of the kids, played with them, entertained them, and they played with all the neighbor kids.

I could send Tricia and Sherri down to the park in the morning. They'd walk down there, then come home at noon for lunch when all the other kids went home. After their nap, they'd go back down to the park, down in the Sondergaard Addition, and play with all the kids. No adults down there. It was way down, and we couldn't even see our kids from our street or our house. Then they'd come home in time for supper and play outside in our yard.

You couldn't do that nowadays, send your kids down there to play alone or anything. It's a lot different now. I can't believe I'd see my

Tricia walking down there with Sherri, and Sherri couldn't have been more than just walking. Golly. Anyway, they did.

We had a swing set. My folks bought my kids a nice big swing set with a glider and everything on it for our backyard. Then Daddy, my dad, got a big tire for a sandbox. I didn't know about cats going in there at night. I didn't know that. Sherri would sit in there all day long, and she'd be eaten up by mosquitoes, but she loved that sandbox.

We had a little swimming pool that Grandma and Grandpa Baumgardt bought them. I have pictures of my future son-in-law and another neighbor kid in that pool, and my kids aren't anywhere around. They'd just come over and use our pool. Oh gosh, who ever thought that he'd be my son-in-law someday? I miss him.

The kids played outside all day long with the neighbor kids.

After their dad left in 1967, the kids and I moved to Pearl Street. It was a duplex, with an apartment above us, and we were downstairs. My dad, Grandpa Bill, owned it. We lived there for seven years.

Then we got a housing house at 1413 Frank Avenue, across from Bob's Lanes. It was a nice three-bedroom, one-bath house, with no garage again. I haven't had a garage much in my life. We lived there

until the kids were older. Tricia's confirmation was there, I think, so she was thirteen.

Later, I moved to Blooming Prairie on a pig farm. We had 600 feeder pigs to take care of, and a nice little two-bedroom house. I was married to Harp then. We lived out there, and it was really nice. I learned to play horseshoes there. Our friends came over, and her husband thought I had played horseshoes before because I was so good. His name was Herb too, and he just couldn't believe I hadn't played before, because his wife and I used to beat the two Herbs.

From there, he quit that job, and we moved to the farm out on the Bath Road outside of Albert Lea. We had twelve acres. I worked at the stables and at Boyd and Jack's Deli. Sherri also worked there as a checker. Tricia, I don't remember where she was working. Bruce was in college. First he went to Austin, then to Mankato, and then he ended up at Luther College and put himself through and graduated from there.

Sherri was the babysitter in the family. She babysat a lot of kids, like I did when I was young, and she was my helper. I always wrote notes to my kids when I went to work if I wanted them to do something.

I came home one night, and there was a note for me. It said, "Mom, I made your bed, but the sheets were too big for it." She had used double sheets instead of twin sheets. I had a twin bed in my little

back room on Pearl Street. Then she wrote, "I picked the lint off the carpet, and I only fighted once."

One Mother's Day, she got me the nicest card. It said something like, "Thinking of you and all the misery you go through," and it was a sympathy card instead of a Mother's Day card. I still have it. She didn't even know it was a sympathy card. Oh gosh, we laughed over that.

Sherri was my lovey-dovey one, always calling me, always sending me letters and cards and gifts. She was the sweetie one. Bruce and Tricia picked on her a lot, and I felt sorry for her. They really teased her, especially Tricia.

Bruce could sit for ten hours at a time putting model cars together, or model working engines. He was into cars like you wouldn't believe. Anything Bruce wanted to learn, he learned on his own. He'd go to the library and get books. There was no access to things on TV, and we didn't have computers—nothing like that then. He would learn by himself. He was on the honor roll in school and in high school.

Tricia, I guess, just took up space, because I don't know how she made it through school, but I never got any calls. Well, one time I had to take her into the principal's office, Mr. B's from church, because she and her girlfriend had run away. They were gone for a few days, and of course we parents were all worried sick. We found

them out by Clarks Grove, freezing to death in an old deserted house. The guys, of course, had taken off.

Tricia said, “All I could think about was you and Sherri and Bruce eating pork chops and gravy and potatoes, and you were warm.”

I said, “Yeah.”

I want to tell the story about when I got pregnant with Tricia Lynn.

My dad never said anything, but Mom, Grandma Lyla, fainted. She had never talked to us about sex, nothing. When I was fourteen and got my first period, she said, "Now when you get married, you can have a baby." That was the extent of my health class.

Then when they had health class in school, that was a laugh. It was just washing your hands before you eat and after you go to the bathroom, and taking a bath. That was about it.

With Tricia, Mom and Dad took me up to an unwed mothers' home in St. Paul, Minnesota, about two blocks from the state fairgrounds. The state fair was on. I remember that because it was before school started in the fall. I had been home all summer, sick, working. I was fifteen years old.

They took me up there with my brothers, Tedd and Todd, along, and dropped me off at this home. There was no bed for me, no room. They were supposed to have about twenty-five girls there, and there were about thirty-six of us. We were all in a big dorm room, but I didn't have a bed the first night because they didn't have one for me.

I was right by the front door. They were just swinging doors then, with leather on the sides that you pushed open. There were no locks

or anything. All I heard was sirens and cars because of the state fair going on. I was so scared, and I think I cried all night long because I didn't know what was going on.

In the next couple days they got a bed for me. We were all in one big dorm room, like maybe people in the service have to sleep in, but there were thirty-six of us instead of twenty-six. The little girl next to me was twelve years old, and she had been raped, and they put her in there. The gal across from me had been there before. This was her fifth baby she was giving away.

So it was a variety. That woman and another gal used to sneak out and get cigarettes and be outside smoking. I remember that. I wouldn't have gone outside at night in Minneapolis or St. Paul. I was scared to death.

I got a good job there. I worked in the dining room, and when they found out I had been a waitress, I got to be the waitress for the nuns at their meals. So they liked me. Then they wanted me to play for our services, too, because I could play piano. So I played for some of the services.

Then our pastors found out about everything, and they decided we should get married. That was how we found out we were getting married. They cut my pretty long hair off and gave me a real tight perm, and put me in a blue box suit for the wedding. They told my

brothers, who were in sixth grade at the time, about twelve years old, that they were going to my birthday party.

After that, we lived with Peggy and Cecil—Grandma and Grandpa Lutz. Your dad worked at the creamery with Grandpa Cecil, and then at the lumberyard in Amboy. Then we moved out to Grandma Lutz's after Tricia was born. Oh, it was so wonderful out on the farm. They were so happy to have us, and she was so sad when we moved to Albert Lea.

Daddy found a job for Mike in Albert Lea, at the poultry farm up the road from where he had his poultry farm. This was a laying house for chickens. That was when the grandpas came over and redid the schoolhouse, and that was our first house.

I had pretty much ten years of unhappy marriage, and I tried so hard to cover up things. I always took my babies to Sunday school and church and everything.

One little cute story I want to tell about Bruce is from church, when he was just talking and walking. We always sat in the back, because then I could take you kids out if I needed to, or we could go to the nursery. That's what they used to do with kids, sit in the back.

At the end, the preacher was talking, and we were saying the Lord's

Prayer. When we were done and said, "Amen," Bruce stood up in the pew and said, "Mom, where's Jesus?"

I love that story. He wanted to know, if we were praying and talking about Him all the time, where was He? Everybody laughed, and they actually clapped. That was my Bruce. He was so cute.

After their dad left, it was just me being a single parent with you kids. We didn't discuss your dad at all. You never asked where he was, because he was gone all the time anyway. So that was me and my kids. Avis and her kids.

I kept in contact with Grandma Peggy and Grandma Lutz and all of them. Every Christmas, I took gifts. For ten or eleven years we went over there in my 1964 Dodge Dart, straight stick. One Christmas it was so cold that the radiator was probably going to freeze up, or whatever it does. So we tore the bottom out of the box the presents were in, and Bruce put that in front of the radiator on the way over to Welcome, on the other side of Fairmont, to Grandma Peggy's for Christmas Day. I always had lots of blankets along to keep you warm.

We made it over there, and we made it home. She was always happy to have us for a meal. One year we even took Grandpa Bill along because Grandma Lyla was very sick with the flu, so Grandpa went with us.

Anyway, we got along just fine. I thought someday I would tell you about your dad. And now he's gone. He passed away just about a month ago or so. So now he's probably at peace.

Binion's
HORSESHOE
LAS VEGAS

Vegas & Graveyard Shifts

I decided to go to Las Vegas when I was out on our acreage and getting divorced. I begged a neighbor man and his son, and they came and helped me move everything to my mom's basement.

I wanted to go to Las Vegas because my sister, Gayle, and her husband had gone out there many years before. They stayed there awhile and then moved to southern Utah, and they're still there. I had always loved Vegas. I had gone out there many times with my girlfriends, and those were some pretty fun trips.

When I moved, I packed my car and asked a friend of mine, Dirty Harry, if he wanted to ride along. He said, "Sure, I'll go along. There are some people out there who can give me a ride back home." So he came to help with the driving and all that.

Then, at the last minute, my Sherri, my middle girl, decided she wanted to move to Las Vegas too. She left her car behind and had

about five bucks in her pocket. I said, “Come on, Mom, and you’ll be fine.” So we trucked along out to Vegas.

My 1977 Ford LTD was a beautiful car, but if you had been running it for a while and then stopped someplace, like at a restaurant, you couldn’t shut it off. It wouldn’t start again until it was cold.

One morning, Sherri and I were leaving a hotel somewhere—we’d stayed at a Super 8, and it was very nice and clean. We went into a restaurant for breakfast, and I forgot and shut the car off. When I went back out, I couldn’t get it started. Sherri went over to this man coming by and said, “My mom needs a jump.” So he came over and jumped my car, and we were on our way again, down to Las Vegas.

We went through Vail, and we were lucky we got through there. Just after we went through, there was a big storm, and most people didn’t get through at all. We were lucky we didn’t have any trouble.

When we got to Vegas, we moved in with some friends from Albert Lea, Jim and Betty Rupp, and their girls. That was interesting. Betty didn’t like to cook, so I was the cook, chief bottle washer, laundry lady—I did everything there. She loved having me. She’d just come home from work.

Betty worked setting up gambling machines. She may be retired now, but she’s still there. When I baked, the girls would sit up on the

counter and wait for the cookies to come out of the oven, and they'd eat them as fast as they could.

I asked Betty one time, "Do you have any recipe books?"

She said, "Why? What do you want to make?"

I said, "I want to make some homemade pudding."

She said, "Doesn't it come in a box?"

I said, "Betty, you've been keeping house for thirty years. You can make pudding with just sugar and cocoa."

That was about the extent of that.

I slept on the floor in their family room on a foam mattress I bought at Lowe's or someplace like that. It was just like a twin mattress, and it was more comfortable than the couch. I had taken my dad's little tiny black-and-white TV along too, so I'd have a TV. I used that little thing for three or four years out there.

I don't remember getting another TV until Sherri met her first husband. That was when she met Doc Bruce. He was a chiropractor, and I went to him too.

I came back to Albert Lea for a while, and then later I went back to Vegas again. Tricia, my oldest, and Wayne decided they were going to go out there and get married. I said, "Well, why don't you get married by Auntie Gayle? Uncle Bob's a justice of the peace."

So they came along with us. It was Halloween night, and we packed that car. We had a car-top carrier, and I had to take one of my spare tires out. I wanted both spare tires, but we couldn't get everything in the car. We were moving a household of things to live on—sheets, dishes, pans, clothes. Oh my God. But that was a big car, and oh, it was a nice car.

My daddy bought me that car. It was five thousand dollars, the most expensive car I ever had. He got it in Freeborn, Minnesota, at Hinkley's. I bought all my used cars there, and I never had any problem with his cars.

On one of those trips out west, I had a flat tire in Colorado somewhere. Harry was along that time, and he changed it for me. Then I didn't have a real spare, just the little bitty one you can drive on for a while. In the morning, we pulled into Green River or someplace in Colorado and went to a big old tire store. I got one used tire, which I don't think you can buy anymore. Now they want to sell you four

at a time. I don't remember what it cost me, but they got it changed and we were on our way.

When Trish and Wayne were along, we stopped in Enterprise, Utah, where Uncle Bob and Autie Gayle lived. Uncle Bob married them there, and Gayle played the organ and sang. They had a nice reception for Trish and Wayne. Back then, I think Dana and Jack only had Sammy, but now they have eight children total and thirty-eight grandchildren. They have expanded their family, that's for sure. That's a very interesting story all by itself.

Uncle Bob was a fireman in Las Vegas when he retired. Before that, he had been a policeman, and Gayle wanted him to stay a policeman, but he wanted to be a fireman. He drove back and forth from Enterprise to Vegas every twenty-four hours or whatever his shift was. He loved to drive, and he didn't want music on or anything. He just drove. I think it was about 175 miles, and he did that for at least twenty years. I could hardly believe it.

I liked it, though, because when I flew into Las Vegas, Uncle Bob could always pick me up.

One time, when Bonnie Wendleboe and I were out there, Uncle Bob was going to pick us up in the morning from our hotel, the Westward Ho. There he was with Liberace's brother, because Liberace was trying to get my sister and her husband to donate their

piano from Vienna. There were only five left at the time. They said, "You can have it on loan, but we don't want to give it to you." But they never did let it go. She kept it, and that was a good idea.

Liberace used to live across the street from my girlfriend Bonnie. He had a station wagon painted like a piano, and the help used it to go to the store and everything. I'd call Bonnie and say, "What are you doing?"

She'd say, "Oh, Libby's coming over for coffee, so I can't talk."

We'd laugh about that. I had been to see Liberace many, many times over the years. When I went out there by myself to my sister's, I had to go see Wayne Newton and Liberace. It was a lot cheaper then—maybe twenty-five dollars. Now it's probably a hundred or two hundred at least.

I saw a lot of shows. Sherri took me to see Tom Jones, and he wiped his sweat on my linen napkin, which I got to keep. I brought it home and didn't even wash it for years. I still have it somewhere. I used it in a bread basket as a cover for my buns when I had company.

Eventually Sherri and I got an apartment in Las Vegas, after staying with Betty and Jim on Jones Boulevard. Then I had to get a job.

Sherri got a job right away as a keno runner at the Golden Nugget.

She had to wear this little short outfit, and she made good money there. She made more in tips in a month than she did in wages, and she made a thousand dollars a month in wages with benefits at the Nugget.

She even helped arrange a room for Tricia and Wayne for their wedding nights. Sherri's girlfriend Candace had a boyfriend who was in charge of entertainment and things there. After Tricia and Wayne got married up in Enterprise, they went to Las Vegas, and Sherri and Diane Hultman came to get them. Wayne and Tricia had a really nice suite at the Nugget for their honeymoon night.

If they had put enough coins in the machine, they would have won the big progressive jackpot. I forget how much it was—maybe twenty-five thousand dollars—but they only had one coin in. Later, when I sold coins to the bus people who came in, I would tell them, "Now don't put just one coin in. Read what it says. If you only have one coin in and you get the right symbols, you're not going to win the big jackpot. You're only going to win what it says for one coin."

I tried to tell people. They'd come in and ask, "Which machine hasn't hit for a while?"

I'd look at them and say, "I don't know. This one has been played a lot, but then so has that one. And if I knew which ones were going to hit, I'd be down there playing them instead of working up here for five dollars an hour."

At first, I had to carry around a hundred dollars in change for eight hours a day. It was a killer. Now they don't have that anymore. Most places just have paper tickets, like down at Diamond Jo's.

The Orbit isn't there anymore. Betty was a bartender there, and a couple of other guys from Glenville worked there too—Cindy's brothers. Cindy's other brother, Haas Dahl, was a big football player in Albert Lea, and I mean big. He was the manager of a bar right across the street, and they had dancing and line dancing lessons and everything. He passed away too, like her brother did.

The last place I lived in Vegas was by the Showboat Casino. It was a big apartment complex. I think they said there were three or four thousand people there, with all these different buildings. My girlfriend from work called me Mom Number Two because her mother had passed. She was from Wisconsin, and she lived in the first building when you drove into the complex. I lived farther down, more toward the middle by the pool. Then Donna, the gal who got me a job through the employment office, lived in the third one. So there the three of us were, all in that same complex.

Donna and I joined a singles dance thing for "old people"—forty years old or better, I guess. I was in my forties then, and oh my gosh, I'm eighty-three now.

We went to these dances, and they were mixers. There was one man

who danced quite a bit. I think his name was John. He worked out at Nellis Air Force Base. He wasn't in the service, but he worked in the offices there. Come to find out, we lived in the same complex, in the same building, and he lived downstairs from my second-story apartment.

He asked if he could show me Nellis Air Force Base the next day. It was a Saturday, so he took me out for breakfast, and then we went for a drive out to see the base. Later he brought me an Easter basket. But I just wasn't interested in looking for any man. I had just left one. I shouldn't say I got rid of him, but my ex went to live with his cousin's wife after the cousin died. She had money and a farm, and I had nothing. No.

The job I really liked was on graveyard shift. I went to work at eleven at night and got off at seven in the morning. That is not easy, and I still think I'm on graveyard hours.

I worked at the Union Plaza in the gift shop by the front desk. We sold tickets for the big train company too—Union something. I always wanted to ride that train, but I never did.

There were usually two of us working, one on the jewelry side and one on the side with souvenirs, papers, and all the rest. It was busy

all night. People came in from all over the world, buses and everything. Some couldn't speak English.

My girlfriend Barb worked across from me on the jewelry side. One night we had a bus come in from France, I think. She started talking real loud to them, and then I caught myself doing it too. She said, "Why are you talking so loud?"

I said, "Well, you are."

She said, "Well, I think they can understand me."

I said, "No, they're not going to understand you any better if you talk loud."

We weren't allowed to speak another language at work unless we were translating for a customer. We worked with a lot of Spanish people, and a lot of the change girls spoke Spanish, but it said right in our handbook that they weren't supposed to do that except for customers. We'd hear those women talking Spanish all night long, so we wouldn't know what they were saying.

We also had cleaning ladies, big Black women with nails two inches long, and we got to be friends with them just by working together. We'd talk about their hair and how they took care of it. It was fun to learn from all those different people and all those different races.

There was one man who always came in wanting us to buy him cigarettes. I said, "I stand here for two weeks just to pay my rent. I'm not buying you cigarettes." Cigarettes were a dollar and a quarter a pack then, and people were having a fit because they'd gone up a quarter. This man had the clothes on his back and that was it, because he gambled everything away.

There was another cleaning man, a Mexican man, and he'd come in saying, "Hey, you honkies." One night Barb finally said something right back to him, using a slur for him. He was appalled. Barb said, "Well, you call us honkies." He never called us that again.

One of the night pit bosses came in all the time for cigarettes. He'd bring us decks of cards they were throwing away. They couldn't use them very long, especially if they were busy, because they didn't want people marking them. One night I noticed he had a pin with his name on it, made out of gold wire. It wasn't long before he came in with pins for me and Barb, with our names done the same way. I think I still have mine somewhere.

That Christmas, Sherri and I got to go up to Auntie Gayle's in Enterprise. It was the first time I had ever had a Christmas celebration with them, and the first time Sherri had ever been with her Auntie Gayle and Uncle Bob on Christmas. Gayle is a gourmet cook, along with being a seamstress and an artist. She worked for the city

for twenty years and helped get a clinic built in Enterprise with my brother. She can sew anything. She is just amazing.

I'd always tell her, "Not that I don't think of you as my real sister, because she's adopted, but you were born with that in you. I think you're born with it, the way you can do all those things and figure them out. I try so hard, and if I have somebody next to me, I can learn. But if they leave me, I'm lost."

That was some of my Las Vegas.

I have to tell the story of Donna. She was the woman who got me the job, and she lived in the same apartment complex. I met her at the employment office. She told me once that she was in a book, but I never got the name of it. I've tried to find her over the years by both names, and her daughter too. Her daughter was the head of the keno game at the Hotel Continental. We used to go there on Friday nights because lobster was five dollars, and we'd see Donna's daughter.

Donna had quite a life. She had some stories, I'll tell you.

One night Donna and I decided to go over to Montgomery Ward, which was right next to where we lived by the Showboat. When Montgomery Ward closed at ten o'clock, we said, "Well, now what

do we do?" There we sat, and neither one of us had any money to go anywhere, do anything, or put gas in our cars.

So we decided to go to a store across from Montgomery Ward. We went in, and I said, "Donna, this is a really funny store." It had a counter in front, but then you walked in and there were little rooms with curtains on them. Here it was a porn shop, and neither one of us had ever been in a porn shop.

The man said, "Can I help you girls?"

Yeah, we were "girls" all right.

We went back and looked around. Donna collected desert and Western-type things, and she had whips and chains and everything in her house. We saw some whips in the back, and I said, "Look here, Donna. You can get yourself a whip."

Then I saw those blow-up dolls. I said, "Why don't you get one of them for your house?"

She said, "Oh yeah, and then have my daughter come over and see that I've got that?"

I said, "Well, you can just suck the air out of him when you're not using him and lay him under your bed. She won't even know you've got him. I'll have him one week, and you have him one week."

That's the story of me and Donna.

Another morning, when Sherri and I both got off work, we went across to the Horseshoe downtown. She knew a couple of the guys there, so we went to the little bar in the back. She was going to play her quarter video poker, and we were just sitting there while people came and went.

Some men came in, and most people thought Sherri and I were sisters, which was really nice. Sherri said, "No, that's my mother."

They said, "Oh yeah, right."

I said, "No, I'm her mother."

They wanted to know where we were from and all that, and then they asked, "Are you working girls?"

Sherri said, "Oh yes, we've worked all our lives."

They said, "Oh really? Well, how much do you get?"

One of the cocktail waitresses came over and said, "Don't you know what working girls are?"

We didn't know "working girls" meant prostitutes. There was Sherri

saying, “Oh yes, my mom and I have been working all our lives.” That’s my story of the Horseshoe.

One time Barb and I had the same time off, and we went to a casino right behind where she lived in a trailer park, not far from me. We noticed a machine where somebody had left all kinds of quarters in the bucket. There was nobody around. They must have been drunk or just took off and left their money.

Barb and I would get a bucket, put in a couple quarters, and pretend like we had won. Then when a couple more quarters came out, we’d scoop up the money and away we’d go. Then we’d go have Mexican food at the restaurant and a margarita. Oh, that was good food.

I loved being able to go up and see my sister. Sometimes they would meet us in Mesquite, Nevada. Years ago, that was about the last place before you got into that part of the trip, but now of course it’s all built up. The people who built and owned Trish and Wayne’s house in Albert Lea moved to Mesquite and had a condo there. They always told me to stop, but I never did.

Gayle and Bob would come to Mesquite and bring whoever they could from Dana’s family, so I got to see a lot of my babies there.

Then I was thrilled beyond whatever I can say because I was going to

be a grandma for the first time, with Trish and Wayne. I was so excited. At Thanksgiving, Tricia flew out with Bruce and told me that she and Wayne were pregnant. I had asked Bruce to bring me some lefse from Minnesota because you couldn't get it in Las Vegas then. Now you can get it all over, but back then they had never even heard of it. I called every deli and bakery in town.

When Tasia was due, I was down by the pool with Donna and her family on the Fourth of July. They were lighting firecrackers and everything. Tasia was supposed to be born on the Fourth, but she didn't come then. She came at two o'clock in the morning Minnesota time, so she was born on the fifth of July instead.

That night, after the firecrackers, I told Donna I didn't feel very good and was going home to bed. I woke up about 2:15 in the morning and couldn't go back to sleep. The next morning they called me, and that was about the time Tasia was born. I guess I was there in spirit when my little Tasia came into the world.

I couldn't stand being away after Tasia was born. Tricia would call crying, "Can't you come home, Mom? Mom, Mom, Mom?"

I'd say, "Call Grandma, or call Grandma Peggy, or Grandma Roxy. I'll be there in a month for her baptism."

So I came home for the baptism. Then I went back to Vegas, quit my job at the Plaza, and moved home to take care of my Tasia Lynn.

That was so much fun. She was a sweetheart and a good baby. Tricia was happy to see her mommy, and so was her dad.

Joining The Church

This is a story that is very interesting to me. I was in the Lutheran Church for 55 years. I was baptized and confirmed there. Then, after many years, my sister and her husband in Las Vegas joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons. Later they moved up to southern Utah, and they have lived there ever since. Their family is all in the church, and I had been out there enough in Utah to stay with them and see that part of their lives.

Then I had two back surgeries. The day I came home from my second back surgery in Albert Lea, two little gals came to my door. They were missionaries. They came in, and they just overwhelmed me. They were so sweet. They started giving me lessons and reading with me about the church.

My sister never usually called me a lot, but one day when the missionary girls were there, the phone rang, and it was my sister. She said, “What are you doing?”

I said, “I’m talking to the sisters.”

I was crying so hard I could hardly talk. She said, “Why are you crying?”

I said, “Well, I’m joining the church.”

She said, “Oh, Bob and my prayers are answered. We’ve been praying all along that you would join the church and be with us.”

Then she called me back later and said, “Well, don’t buy this, and don’t buy that.” For my birthday and Christmas that year, they bought me all my garments and things to wear to the temple.

I was 55 years old when I joined the church. I had already been baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church, but now I had my baptism coming up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When Bob and Gayle called, Bob said they were coming for my baptism. They drove here, and they had a couple of grandchildren along with them.

My brother-in-law Bob baptized me. It was not in Albert Lea, because we didn’t have our church then. It was in Austin, Minnesota. It was a hot, humid day, and they said it was the biggest crowd, the biggest amount of people that had ever been to a baptism there in Austin.

A lot of the Austin church members came. My girlfriend Bonnie

from Winona came with her daughter and son-in-law. My sister came. My niece flew in from Cleveland, Ohio. The girls who came along with Gayle and Bob, their granddaughters, were there too.

Bob baptized me, and Gayle gave the talk. I think she played the organ too, or maybe one of the sister missionaries did. The missionaries and the two little gals who came with Gayle and Bob sang a couple of songs also.

Afterward, we had a potluck. We even had fresh pineapple from Hawaii. My girlfriend's daughter flew in from Hawaii that day, and she brought pineapple with her and shared it with us at my baptism. Everyone thought that was really something, to have pineapple from Hawaii.

It was a very lovely day. It was hot and humid, but I made it through.

I love my church. It's the family part of it. I have been Grandma Avis in the church for at least 26 years now, starting with Gina's family. When Gina came here, she had Alex. And then she married Mitch Wadding. They're my church family. They're my adopted family.

I also have Sarah and Jason Stultz and Landon, and they're my family too. Landon calls me every Sunday to give me a ride to church, and he tells me he loves me.

And I tell him, "I love you more than the moon and the stars."

That's what I say to my grandchildren.

That's from Grandma Avis.

My Tricia Lynn

The night before Tricia was born, we went to the movies in Winnebago, and I was feeling uncomfortable because I didn't know anything about having a baby. I didn't know it hurt to have a baby. And the men couldn't be in the labor room with you then. If you were having pains or they were checking you, they didn't let the men in.

Anyway, she was born at 7:21 in the evening on a Monday night. I was there all day because your dad thought you were going to just fall out onto the floor, just like that. Then we had to stay in the hospital a long time then. I think I was there at least five days, and they kept you about a week or something. I don't know.

Everybody thought she was a beauty. Oh gosh, she was a beauty.

We went home to Great-Grandma Lutz's, out on the farm, with Great-Grandma Florence and Great-Grandpa Ray and Uncle Lowell. They loved having us there. In fact, the first night we were

home from the hospital, Great-Grandma had gotten up with you during the night, and I didn't even hear you.

They wanted us to live there with them, and Mike could help on the farm and that. But my dad got a job for Mike at Kruger's Egg Lane Farm, the chicken farm off the hill from my dad's poultry farm. So we moved to Albert Lea, and we lived with Mom and Dad for about three months, which was a real treat.

Great-Grandpa Lutz and Great-Grandpa Smith came over from Welcome and Granada every day during the week and remodeled an old schoolhouse by the poultry farm house. That's where we moved into, and they got that all done in about three months. I fed them every day, and they loved my blueberry pie. They thought I was such a good cook.

Tricia was such a good baby. In fact, I only had to take her to the doctor once, and that was when she was a year and a half. I didn't know she had an ear infection. That's why she cried, so I took her in. She was eighteen months old before that ever happened, and by then we already had another baby. We had Sherri then.

She was just a good little girl. We had a dog out there named Mitzi that she played with, but we had to get rid of Mitzi because Mitzi ate the chickens. We would go down and see Grandpa Bill every day, a couple times a day. We'd go down the hill in the buggy they got us,

and I'd put Sherri in there with Tricia, and we'd truck down to see Grandpa Bill.

When Tricia went into kindergarten, she got along well with everybody there. The teachers liked her, and she behaved, and she played pretty good with her brother and sister. She was a pretty quiet child, when I think about it now.

When she got into her teens, those were her rambunctious years. That's when she wasn't such a good kid.

Tricia graduated in 1977, and then we both went to Riverland College together and graduated in 1979, both of us, from Food, Dining, and Catering. We went out there, and that was interesting.

Then she went up to the Cities to live, but she only lasted about two weeks up there with Ranae, her girlfriend. Then she wanted to come back home. She didn't like it up there at all. She hated getting on the bus and going to work and all that stuff. So she came back to Albert Lea.

Then I moved to Las Vegas off the farm, and she moved into a couple houses in town with some girlfriends and so on. Later, she broke up with her boyfriend and met someone else, his friend, Wayne Bell Richard. They went together for a couple years, got married, and had my first grandchild.

My first grandchild was born when I was in Las Vegas, and I moved home to take care of her. Tricia would call me crying, "Come home, Mom, come home. I need you." So I moved home when Tasia was about a month old. We had her baptized, and Aunt Sherri came and drove home with me and brought everything home.

Tricia and Wayne lived on Newton Avenue on the corner then, and Wayne raced stock cars. Grandma Roxy and I didn't like it because we were afraid he was going to crash. I quit going.

Then they had Trevor, and later they bought a house over by the channel in Albert Lea, by the park, Dane Park. I took the kids for walks every day over there to the little island. Actually, I was kind of scared walking across that rickety old bridge with the kids. Now they've got it fixed up again, and it isn't so wobbly. But then I was afraid I was going to lose one of those kids in the water. Still, we went walking twice a day at least while Mom and Dad were working.

One time Tricia said she was going to have spaghetti for supper, and I said, "Oh, that sounds good." They said, "Well, just stay and eat with us."

Then when I wanted to go home that night, little Trevor said to me, "Well, can't you stay with me tonight, Grandma?"

I said, "Well, there's no place to sleep."

They said, “You’ve got a little bed,” and I said, “Grandma has to go home so she can sleep in her own bed.”

And Trevor said to me, “Grandma, you can sleep with Daddy.”

We loved that.

Those are some of my early memories of Tricia, and of when she and Wayne had their babies.

My Sherri Rae

Now I'd like to talk about my Sherri Rae, my daughter, my second child. She came into the world about an hour after I got to the hospital. She had caramel skin and black hair, and she was a sweetie. She weighed 8 pounds, 2 ounces, and she was a good baby.

When she was little, we moved to 16th Street. She was a good kid, a good girl. She was always my comfy-cozy one. If I went somewhere, she'd write notes to me. The last one I remember, and I've still got it, said, "I changed your sheets on your bed, but they were too big." She had put double sheets on instead of twin-size ones for me. Then she wrote, "And I only fighted once with Trish and Bruce, and I picked the lint off the carpet, Mom." I always used to go around picking lint off our blue carpet.

When she graduated from high school, she moved to Las Vegas with me and worked at the Golden Nugget as a keno runner. She met her doctor there and married him. That was a beautiful wedding in

Vegas. On the video, when she came in, you can hear everybody going, "Oh," because she was such a beautiful bride.

We all lived in Las Vegas then, and I was still there. Later, after I came back to Minnesota, she came back too. She went to community college here in Albert Lea, I think for clerical work. But then she decided she wanted to do nails. She didn't want to do hair fixing; she wanted to do nails only. So I got the money, and she went to school down at La' James College in Mason City. She did so well in that.

Then she moved to Iowa and was working part-time at a hotel bar, and she met a guy who was down there working. They got married, and she was married to him for 25 years.

Sherri always called me. Sometimes she called me three, four, five times a day just to say something she was thinking about. It was like we were next door. I went down there many, many times because, of all things, Sherri didn't have any children, and she always wanted children. When she was 42 years old, she gave birth to our miracle baby. They're all miracles, but Dalton Leigh Cathcart was our miracle baby.

Dalton is 23 years old now, and he's about 6 foot 4. He's a good guy. He does concrete work and carpentry, like his dad. He's thoughtful, and he calls me. I tell him his mom is smiling down on him because she taught him well.

Sherri was always sending me cards and gifts and calling me when Dalton was little. He used to call me every night, and Dalton would talk about the moon. I'd say, "Now you remember that Grandma says we see the same moon every night. You and I, we see the same moon." Then he would say his prayers to me over the phone every night.

But Sherri got sick. I used to make a lot of trips down there in my old vans. They never had air conditioning or anything, and I'd go down to Illinois. But I didn't get down there after Dalton's graduation.

Sherri got sick with cancer, and I didn't realize how bad she was. She didn't tell me. She passed away on December 9th, two days before my birthday, in 2024.

I can't get used to the fact that she's gone yet. I still talk to her, and to her son and her husband. But she's in heaven now with Grandpa and Grandma, and I can be secure in that feeling. I love you, Sherri Rae.

My Bruce Michael

Okay, now I'm going to talk about my Bruce.

We got a boy, a healthy boy. He was hungry all the time, and still is. We were in our new house then, out on 16th Street in Albert Lea, Minnesota. You had two sisters, Tricia and Sherri. Tricia and Sherri are sixteen months apart, and Bruce and Sherri are two years apart.

You were an excellent baby. You used to sit for hours — eight, ten hours — and put plastic working motors together, and cars, and draw artwork on cars. You were into that.

When you were about twelve years old, Tricia was dating Tom Hestness, who owns R&S Racing, and you would go down there and hang out with Tom and all the car guys. Tom raced then. Also, you went and got a job when you were about twelve with Perky, the sewing machine guy. I can't remember his full name, but he belonged to the club I did. He hired you to help fix sewing machines when you were just a young whippersnapper.

Then you worked for R&S Racing when you were in high school. You were always ambitious. From the time you were about ten years old, you had your mind set on your goals in life. You take after Dad, my dad, Bill Baumgardt, and you take after Uncle Todd Baumgardt too, especially when it comes to financial things.

Now you are a financial analyst. You were with MetLife for thirty years. You went away to college and put yourself through Luther College, which now is about $50,000 a year. At the time, when you graduated, you were about $5,000 in debt on a credit card. Daddy — my dad — had signed for a credit card for you.

Your girlfriend at the time was Debbie, Deb Christian. Her dad, Mike, was a chiropractor in Albert Lea. She was your love. She wanted to get married when you both graduated from Luther College down in Decorah, Iowa. And you said, "Debbie, I just graduated from college. I don't even have a job. I have to get situated. I've got plans that I want. I've been working for them all my growing-up life."

So she broke up with you and left for Arizona.

You had a new girlfriend then, and she joined the Navy. She was in San Diego, and she told you that if you didn't move out to San Diego, she was getting a new boyfriend.

So you came through Las Vegas to see me, and I gave you what I could to take along for an apartment or whatever you needed. You had your little Horizon packed, even your $300 bike folded up in there. You had that in that little Horizon. Oh, how you could travel. I gave you some money so you could get started.

You've done wonderful.

Then you met Cheryl. She moved into an apartment above you in San Diego with two or three of her girlfriends, to go to college at the university there. That's how you met her.

When I went out there before I moved back to Minnesota, I met Cheryl. We went to San Diego, to the Wild Animal Park and other places. There were so many places.

You and Cheryl went together for a couple of years, and then you got married. I came out there for the wedding. You both had graduated from college, and you were working in different things.

You would go to the library — I don't even think you had a computer then — and learn how to fix things around the house. Stucco and everything. In your first house, you put in new water lines under the sinks because you were trying to sell it and you wanted it right. Everything has to be just perfect with you. Everything in its place.

You and Cheryl had a nice wedding out there. Tasia was your flower girl. We had a nice dance and an outside wedding at Balboa Park.

I flew out two or three times with Grandma Lyla to see you when Katie was born. You and Cheryl were married five years before you had Katie, so you could get your college loans paid. Then you had Eric, and I was out there then too. My girlfriend Barb came from Las Vegas to be with me and you.

You had a beautiful home there. Then you moved to Grand Junction, where Cheryl was from. I was out there too, and I took care of Eric and Katie while Cheryl went to Seattle for a wedding shower. Oh dear.

Then you moved from there to Denver, and you've been in Denver since, in your house. It's very nice. Cheryl's dad helped. You've got six bedrooms and at least two baths. You added on to your double garage so you could put your classic '39 Chevy in there — your dad's Chevy, the one you bought from him. Now you've sold it for $10,000. You said it was starting to cost you money.

And now you're going to be a grandpa for the first time. You're sixty-three years old.

Katie is going to be thirty-two now, December 1st. My December

baby, ten days before my birthday. Then you have baby Brian, your baby. He is a pilot in Denver. Eric is a science and history teacher in Denver.

You have a nice home, a nice family. Eric and his mate have moved into their own place, getting ready for the baby they're having. Brian and his girlfriend are still there, I think. Katie moved out of the condo that she had to have, rented it out to a really nice couple, and moved back home with her dog.

I don't get to see them as often as I'd like. I'd like to see them a lot more. And I'm preparing everything here for when I'm gone, so that they will know me.

Trips I Was Blessed To Take

I will tell the story about when I went to Washington, D.C. It was around 1998 or 2000, somewhere in there. My mother had passed away, and we finally got all our things moved and taken care of, so I decided I deserved a trip.

I went on a bus trip through Four Seasons for two weeks. We went to Atlantic City, Washington, D.C., New York City, and Niagara Falls. The first stop was Atlantic City, and it was fun to be on the boardwalk. But I don't gamble. I used to live in Las Vegas, so I don't gamble. We stayed there for the night and then went on to Washington, D.C.

In Washington, we went to the Vietnam Memorial. My sister-in-law Judy's brother died in Vietnam, so I traced his name, Jim Nelson, on a paper to bring home to her. Then some kids who used to babysit for me had a brother who died in Vietnam too. His name was Steve Green, Joanne and Harry Green's son. I traced his name and gave that to Joanne. As a matter of fact, she is still living and lives in the

Senior Towers, in another apartment from me. Isn't that something? It's 2026 now.

The memorial that touched me the most was the Korean War Memorial. The figures were life-size, and it was new since the first time I had been there. I forgot for a while that I had been to Washington before, but I guess I had been there twice. That Korean Memorial was not there the first time. It was very overwhelming. I am a proud American. We are so blessed to be in America.

We also went to the Smithsonian. I had forgotten about that part. You had to pick what you wanted to see because there wasn't time to do everything. It was so wonderful. My brother had given me a whole year of Smithsonian magazine, so it was extra special that I got to see it all.

We went to Constitution Hall too. That was a beautiful building, and we had a tour guide who took us around. On the steps of Constitution Hall there was a homeless man sitting there with a sign, wanting money to live, I suppose. They said he was there every day. I did say hi to him, but I didn't get his name.

A few days after I got home from that trip, I saw him on the national news. He had passed away. It was so ironic to me that I had just seen him sitting there, and then there he was on the national news. I never forgot that.

We also went to the White House. I had forgotten that part at first. I wore that sweatshirt I had on yesterday, and these earrings. That was when Monica Lewinsky and the president were in the news, so we didn't get to go into his office. They said, "You can't come in today." But it was still really great to see the White House.

We stayed in Maryland because the rooms were cheaper there, I suppose, for the company. Then we went on to New York City. We saw Phantom of the Opera and The Lion King. Oh gosh, The Lion King was just wonderful. We stayed right down in Times Square, and that is where I love to stay when I go there. Then you are near the theater and can walk to the theater and everything.

My sister and I went to New York for a weekend too, four days, and we stayed down in Times Square then also. When Sue and I went, we stayed there too. I always liked being close to everything. On this bus trip, we had time for shopping and being in New York, but mostly I remember the shows.

Then we went on up to Niagara Falls. We had dinner there in a restaurant where you look out onto the falls at night. The dining room goes around real slow while you are eating, and by the time you are done with dessert, you are back where you started. You don't even feel it moving. Everybody got to see the falls with all the colors, and it was a delicious meal too.

I didn't go down underneath the falls. I have enough trouble getting to the chair in the dining room.

On the way home, we stopped at the Ford Museum. Then we came on home from there. That was quite a trip, and I certainly enjoyed it.

Another trip I took was to Hawaii, to see my brother Todd when he was going for his master's in international medicine in Honolulu. I met the president of the college, Michael Katz. I don't forget his name, and he said he would never forget mine because he thought Avis was so interesting, like the car rental. He was a hunk, too.

Todd had to study and work on his final papers, so his girlfriend at the time, Diana, took me around everywhere. She lived there, so she knew places to take me that tourists wouldn't always get to see. She showed me places where the purebred Hawaiians lived, and places where people were jumping off cliffs and water skiing—places you wouldn't go unless you were very talented in swimming and skiing. I got to see a lot because of her.

Todd told me about going out to the leprosy island with C. Everett Koop and someone from the college. He said you weren't allowed to stay on that island overnight unless you were full blood and had

leprosy, or something like that. But he went there with C. Everett Koop. That was something.

Then I had another Hawaii trip later on. I flew down to Arizona to my girlfriend Sue's. Her son gave me a ticket because they always had extra tickets from flying all over. Sue had a winter home in Fountain City, Arizona. Right outside her door there was a pond, and every hour the water would come up in a big spray. It was really pretty. She had a beautiful apartment, of course.

The next day, Sue's brother Donnie and his wife Jeanette flew in too. They came from Hastings, Minnesota, and then we all went to Hawaii for seven days on a cruise. We went to five different islands.

The first thing I saw was an Elvis Presley statue up in a bar, and of course I had to go up and sit on his lap. I think I embarrassed them all. Sue is not shy, so she didn't think anything of it, but Donnie was kind of shy. We were celebrating twenty-three years that Donnie had not had a drink, so that made the trip extra nice.

When I left Amboy years ago, Donnie was just a little kid. We called him Little Poncho. He had really curly hair and was a good-looking guy. Now he and Jeanette are retired out of Hastings.

On the cruise, we would get off and take a boat into land so we could go eat or look around. One restaurant I remember was a

Forrest Gump restaurant. Sue sat on the park bench and put her feet in Forrest Gump's cement shoes, and we had a nice time there. Hawaii was so beautiful.

On that cruise, we had so much food. You could eat anything, anywhere. We never even went down for the smorgasbord much because we could go into the restaurants and order, and we didn't have to pay extra. It was all included. We went into the nice dining rooms and ate.

Toward the last day, they had a strawberry and chocolate party down in one of the restaurants. Ice cream, caramel, caramel apples—you name it. We went down to that and ate so much that none of us ate supper that night. I think it was in the afternoon, but oh gosh, it was something.

After the cruise, Donnie and Jeanette stayed with us at Sue's. We went around there, but there had been so much flooding that some places were just opening up again. We went up to a town for the day. Donnie pushed me around in a wheelchair then. I did have an electric wheelchair at home, but there he was, poor thing, pushing me around.

We went out to different places, and one of them was a biker bar. It was a rough place, believe me, but it was fun. You could sign a dollar bill and put it on the wall, and the walls were just plastered with bills. I think I have a picture somewhere of those walls, wallpapered

with money. Everybody there seemed to be bikers. We were about the only ones who weren't on a bike. We had a lot of laughs.

Sue also took me shopping. She always bought her clothes at Talbots, very expensive and classic. She said they made clothes for bigger women, too. We went there, and she bought me a couple hundred dollars' worth of things, and that was on sale. I just saw the tag yesterday in my jewelry box, where I keep these earrings. The brocade jacket was almost $300, and she paid something like $168 for it. She bought me a white blouse and other things too.

Sue always took me to have my hair done and my nails done. She was always good to me that way. She liked to go out all the time, and I don't have to go all the time, but we did go out to eat and walk for exercise from her apartment.

After I left Arizona, not too long afterward, Sue was out walking with a couple of friends from Pennsylvania. One friend had trouble with her back, so she stayed in a little restaurant on the walking path and asked a man if they could sit at his table while the others finished their walk. There were four chairs, three women, and him.

He was from Michigan, and his kids were all from Michigan. He lived with Sue in Pennsylvania, and she took care of him for a year and a half. Then he got Alzheimer's, and she couldn't take care of him anymore. His kids came and got him and took him back to

Michigan, and he passed away there. But she had a lot of fun while they were together.

Sue and he came to Albert Lea to see me one time, and they took me to that fancy restaurant uptown that's closed now—Crescendo. I had never been there. Boy, I'll tell you, it was expensive. I think it was about $300 for us to eat there. They didn't have anything fried. It was all grilled or made special.

The owner used to be the music director at First Lutheran. He was the owner and the chef, and he came out and played the piano for us while we were eating. I got to go there one more time, when Sue came again and took me. It was always nice that she took me out.

One time I went out to Las Vegas to visit my sister and her husband Bob. They didn't live out in Rancho yet. Eventually they moved to Enterprise, Utah, and lived there for fifty or sixty years. Bob has passed away now.

When I was in Vegas, they invited another couple and a man over for me. That night we went out, and of course the music went all night. I said I wanted to go to the Desert Inn because at the top of the Desert Inn they had nice dancing music all night.

Then I got up there and found out my date didn't dance.

It was about four in the morning, and there was a big table of men sitting over in the corner. I said, "Well, I'm going to go over and ask one of them to dance." I had no clue who anybody was. I didn't even really know who my date was. Later I found out he was in the mafia. I didn't doubt that my brother-in-law knew those people, because he was a dealer downtown and everything.

So I went over to that table and asked, "Do any of you dance?" One younger one said, "I do." And we danced and danced and danced.

Then I looked over, and my date had left.

It was daylight by then, so I decided I had better go home. I had to call Uncle Bob to come and get me. Oh my God. That was Las Vegas.

I almost forgot one of the biggest trips. Uncle Todd took my sister Gayle and me to Europe for two weeks. Todd was living in Saudi Arabia then. He was personnel director of a 500-bed hospital, second in command to a sheikh.

Gayle and I flew to Gatwick Airport in England, and Todd flew in from Saudi Arabia and met us there. There were 350 of us on that plane. Our old minister, Pastor Jacobson, and his wife were on the plane too. They were the tour guides for a group going to Denmark, and there were people from Albert Lea on the plane.

I should have slept on the plane, but I didn't. I watched On Golden Pond because I had never seen it, and it was so good. But when I got to England, I was all mixed up on the time. I hadn't even thought about that before I left home. I had worked nine days in a row at the deli before I left, and I was exhausted. I was also very sick.

We got to our hotel, and that afternoon we went and had coffee or tea. For the next few days, we went to the theater every night and went out. I didn't tell Todd and Gayle that I didn't feel good.

We went to York, England, on the train, and we were served dinner while the train was going ninety miles an hour. The waiters served a lovely dinner right there on the train. I didn't know there was a wall built around York. We had our picture taken there, where during the war they could protect themselves. I never knew that.

We stayed at a bed and breakfast that night. It was so nice and cozy and warm. The weather wasn't very nice in York, but the gal there had the place fixed up so nicely. Her name was Mary. I remember that.

By then I was so sick that I finally told Todd and Gayle. We happened to walk by a sign that said "doctor," so I went in. He was a health doctor, or whatever you call them. He asked what was wrong, and I had strep throat. He said, "What does your doctor do?" I said, "He gives me a long-acting penicillin shot and some erythromycin." So he wrote me a prescription.

I didn't even know I could have gone to the free place there. I think it cost me about $100 for that doctor and the pills, but it was the best thing I did. After that, Gayle and Todd took turns driving, though Todd did most of the driving, and I just sat in the back. They bought me a couple of pillows to have in the car.

In England, we went to Parliament, and we spent a whole day at the Tower of London. That was really interesting. We also went to the Lakelands.

When Gayle and I got to our room in England, I said to her, "There's two toilets in here." It was a bidet. I had never seen one before. That was a new experience for me. I tell you, I'm so sheltered.

Then we went to Paris. We went to the Moulin Rouge for dinner and a show, and it was wonderful. The waiter kept flirting with me. Todd said, "Do you know him?" I said, "No, I don't." All I could say was "Oui, oui," because I didn't know any French. Gayle and Todd got a big kick out of it because he kept coming over to the table and talking to me.

The showgirls were dancing, and the show was wonderful. I didn't know what that waiter was saying, though. I could have been answering some real questions with "oui, oui."

We also took a cruise on the river instead of climbing up the Eiffel

Tower. They say it "Eiffel Tower" there, I guess. We saw the tower from the river. The river was the Thames in England, and in Paris we saw Notre Dame. I got a picture of Notre Dame with all four or five spires. My girlfriend Rose Calvin had been there before—she died a few years ago, in 1997—and she told me when I got home, "You've got the best picture of that cathedral I've ever seen, because you got all the spires."

Later, there was that big fire at Notre Dame, and now it has been redone again. When I see something about Paris now, I can say, "Wow, I've been there."

We took a bus trip one day to Marie Antoinette's castle. The thing I remember most was the garden. Out one side of the castle, there were great big flower pots, and they said that in her time she had to have those flowers changed four times a day. That way, when she looked out in the morning, noon, afternoon, and evening, she could see different flowers in her garden. They weren't little pots either. They were huge outdoor pots. I thought that was interesting.

We saw where the dining room was, but they were remodeling that part, so we didn't get to walk through it. I have lots of pictures from Europe, maybe a hundred of them in an album somewhere, taken with my little camera.

One time in Paris, a taxi driver said he didn't know where our hotel

was. My brother got out his book that had ten languages in it—he took that book with him everywhere. The cab driver told us to get out, that he wasn't going to take us back. Well, whatever Todd said to him, we got a ride back to our hotel. My brother told him, one way or another, "You find that hotel." And he did.

Todd always made sure we stayed in nice places. Gayle and I had our own room, and he never put us anywhere shabby. It was a wonderful trip. Whoever would have thought I would go to Europe?

On the airplane from Florida to England, I sat next to a man who spoke French. I said, "Well, I don't know." Then he spoke English, but he was from England, and I couldn't understand him any better. By the time we left England and went to Paris, I could finally understand the people in England. But in York, I couldn't understand them up there either.

When Gayle and I got to the airport to come home to the States, Todd left for Saudi Arabia. We gave him all our English money, all the change and everything. Then we ended up having about an eight-hour layover because there was trouble with the plane. They finally had to bring in another plane for us.

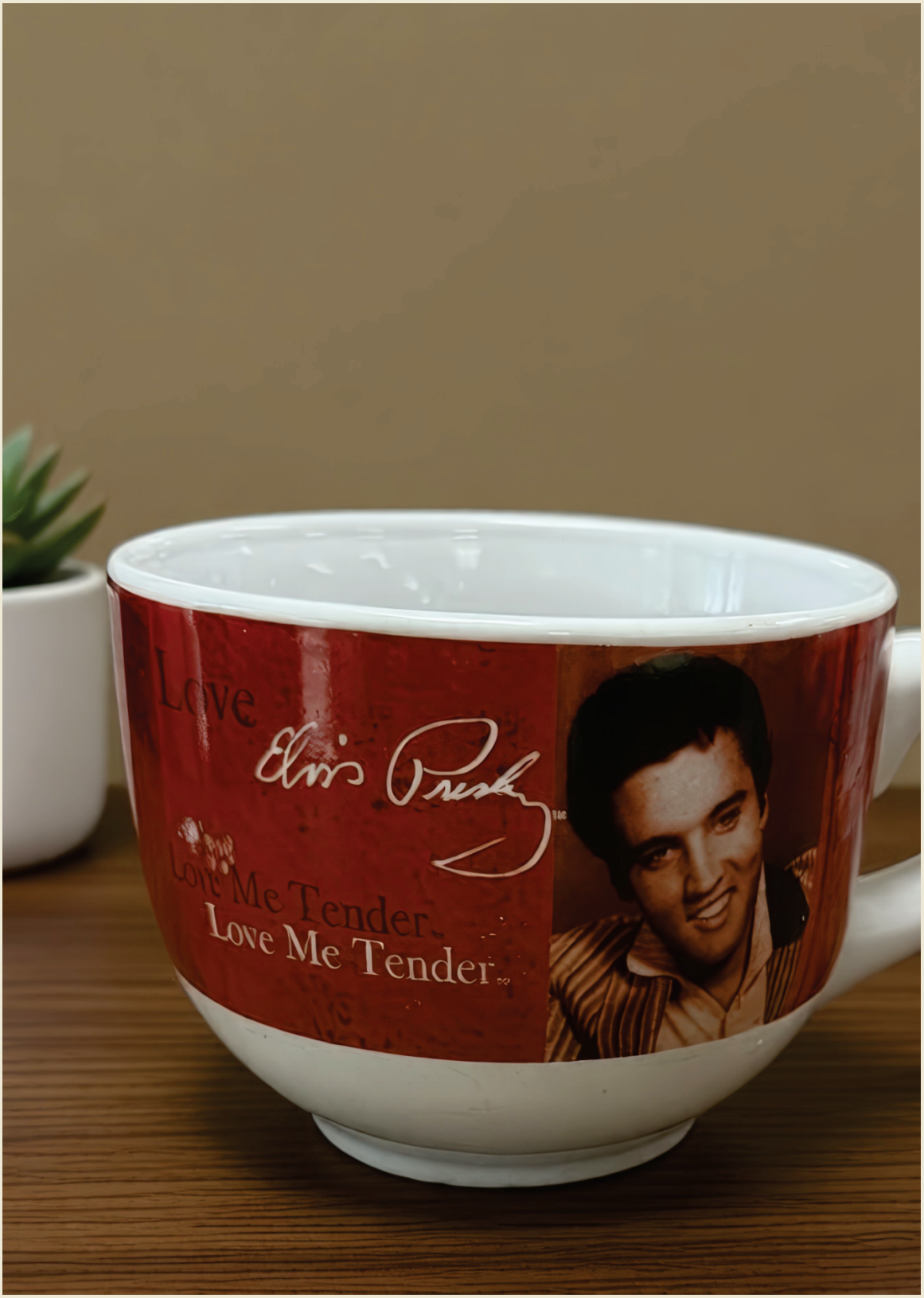
My mother had sense enough to call the airport. I can't believe it—bless her heart. She called and found out what time our plane was

really coming in, so she didn't have to sit there all that time in the parking lot waiting for us.

While Gayle and I waited in the airport in England, we went into the bar. We didn't have any English money because we had given it all to Todd. I think we had enough American cash to buy a pop or something. Oh my gosh, isn't that something?

When we got back to Minneapolis, Gayle flew on to her home in Utah, or maybe through Salt Lake City or Las Vegas then. Now she flies into some little town in Utah. But that was the end of our Europe trip.

Those are the stories I remember now and can think of. I haven't had a chance to even think about them for years. I certainly enjoyed those trips, and it was a blessing that I could go—and that we were safe.


Love
Elvis Presley
Love Me Tender
Love Me Tender

Random Stuff, Laughter, and Elvis

(Neighbor Ken interviewing Avis, May 2026)

Ken: Avis, I'm going to ask you some random questions. Who was the person who had the biggest influence in your life, and why?

Avis: I guess I would say my dad did, because I used to work for him and with him. He taught me that money doesn't grow on trees, and he taught me the value of it.

I'm an excellent budgeter. I have never been completely broke. I always taught my kids, "If you get two dollars, you make sure you save a dollar, just in case." I've always done that. I never get down to the last one.

When I worked at the Holiday Inn after your dad left, I made a dollar five an hour, with three children at home to take care of—eight, six, and four. I had a little notebook, and I wrote everything in it. People at work, in the bar and then the restaurant dining room, would ask me what I was writing down.

Bonnie would say, “She writes down everything. She even writes down two pennies or three pennies.”

Ken: Avis, how would you like to be remembered?

Avis: As I was told when my children were born, I was a good mother for being so young. I’d like to be remembered as a good mother, and grandma, and great-grandma. And that I was a good wife, and I was a hard worker.

I worked so hard. And when my babies come to visit me, it’s the biggest joy I could have. They bring so much joy to me.

Ken: For the generations that are listening to this long after you’re gone, is there any wisdom you would like them to know?

Avis: Make sure you teach your children and grandchildren—and make sure you know yourself—to love the Lord first. That’s first.

Teach your children the Bible, about Jesus, and send them to Sunday school, and take them to church. Because they’ll never forget it. They might not go, but they’ll remember it. And you always have the Lord with you. He’ll be there.

I talk to Him all the time. And He forgives me for bad words.

Ken: Do you have a favorite memory, or best memory, of your childhood?

Avis: Our home. I just thought about this yesterday—that we had everything. We had a nice, warm home. My dad worked hard. Mom worked so hard cooking and baking and keeping her home nice.

We always had to pray before meals and before we went to bed. I always went to church, and had to practice our piano.

I loved going ice skating, roller skating, and bike riding. We built houses out in Mrs. Bailey's woods in the fall—Mike, and Dean, and Mac, and my buddies. We had fun.

Ken: Let me ask you a few questions about school. How would your classmates, if I met them today, remember you as a school child?

Avis: Well, I was very kind to everybody. I wasn't a snob or anything like that. I was always nice to the ones that were picked on.

My buddy John had a hard time reading, and I helped him to read. I

was the youngest one in the class. I was four years old when I started first grade—no kindergarten or nothing.

I was an excellent student in grade school. As I got to the older classes, junior high and high school, then I was more B's and C's. I kind of lost the A's there.

I was in band, and I was in chorus, and piano lessons, and I worked a lot. I babysat a lot and had to earn some money.

I guess I was a pretty good student and a friend. I always was pleasant to everybody, and I still try to be a good friend. Even now at my age, people just are not friendly. They're not kind. I don't know, I can't describe them.

Ken: What was your favorite subject in school? Did it change from grade school to middle school to high school?

Avis: I hated English. I'm still that way. I had a friend from church, and I'd call her and say, "Do you say this or that?" We learned "I before E except after C" and all these things in school.

My favorite subject, I think, was history. I'm still very interested in history. I liked history. And I did like typing. I was good at it in high school.

We didn't have electric typewriters. We had nothing like now. But it was fun learning. We had one electric typewriter in our typing class,

and everybody ran for that desk when we went in there. That was nice because we didn't have to pull all those letters back.

With history, I liked reading about the what, why, and where—not just the date and the year. That's what they told us to remember, that this war was this date. I wanted to know what happened.

When we went to Gettysburg on a bus trip, that's what I liked to know. That's how I remember.

They didn't talk about how the Black people had to live and how they were treated. Or how the Army and Navy, and the troops, treated women and children when they attacked them. They didn't tell how they were treated. Those are some things I would like to learn more about in history.

Ken: Avis, this is a hard question, but you have done so great in these interviews. Now that you're 83 years old, and we're doing this because you're in your later years, talk about any regrets that you've had in life and what you would do differently.

Avis: Oh, that's an easy one. I would have tried harder in school. I would have worked harder, paid more attention, and gotten better grades so that I could have gone on to college.

Back then, most of the women went to secretarial school in Mankato, the commercial college. My mom always wanted somebody to be in the medical field, and both my brothers were in the medical field. I would have paid more attention and tried to learn more about it.

I was so young. I'm very—I don't think about things enough before I make a decision.

Ken: Impulsive?

Avis: Yes. I'm so impulsive, and I've made decisions in my life—oh my goodness. There are a lot of things that I would never do again, things I've done. Just dumb things that I should not have done.

But I always remember that I was taught God takes care of me, and He'll always forgive me for what I've done and said.

If I could do it all over again, I would stay in school and graduate. I would have loved to have gone to the prom. I never got to go to a prom because I was already married and had a baby. We were too young, and you don't think about that. You just do what you're told.

We were told by our parents and our pastors that we were getting married, and that should never have been. People were so ashamed

of us, and it's been happening for thousands of years. They didn't teach us anything, but they were ashamed of us.

I would live my life differently. I would have gotten an education, and then met someone, and then worked together with them for the same goals.

When I retired, I always wanted to get a motor home and travel around—from southern Minnesota all the way around the state of Minnesota first, and then go on down to Texas or Arizona in the winter. That's what I wanted to do.

And have a new car. I'd like to have a new kind of car before I died. I've always had used cars. I never had a car payment, but I had used cars.

My dad paid for the one that I went to Las Vegas in, that '77 Ford. Oh boy, that was a big, beautiful car. Nobody had smoked in it or anything. That's what I had when I moved to Vegas.

He would sign for our cars. We had a '59 white Oldsmobile too. Oh boy.

Ken: Avis, I just found this question. Do you have a sense of humor, and have you ever played a practical joke on anybody?

Avis: Yes and yes. I have a sense of humor. I love to laugh. I can't think of a practical joke right now, but over the years, there were things.

When Bonnie and I were together, we knew what each other was going to say. She would lie to us—or we would lie—and I don't know if Bob caught on to our lies or not, because we were on our way to Las Vegas and back from Las Vegas. They'd take me along, and I think Bob just took me along so he could dump us off on the Strip and go gamble.

We'd end up with five guys from another country who couldn't speak our language, and they were going to teach us how to play craps. Oh my God.

One night a guy on a motorcycle tried to pick us up on the Strip. He wanted to give us a ride. The next day we told my brother-in-law about it. He was a policeman in Vegas then. He showed us the Las Vegas Review-Journal, and it said they had picked up a team of men who were picking up women on the Strip and taking them out in the country and making them be prostitutes.

And Bonnie said, "See, Avey, you never let me have any fun. I wanted to go."

She did. She told me that.

When we were bartending and waitressing—she was a manager and I was the bartender, or the waitress—we had men and women come in from all over. I knew every joke she was going to say.

She'd say, "Avey, come here, come here, I gotta tell you this." The bar would be full, and the music would be playing. She would tell nursery rhymes, and some of them were really something.

Everybody wanted to buy us drinks. If we'd taken all the drinks that were bought for us, we would have been laying on the floor at night. They wanted to see that drink, so she'd make it with 7-Up and then put a little Coke in it to make it look like we had a brandy and soda or something. They were a dollar a drink then. I think it's about ten dollars a drink now when you go to a bar. I don't know. I don't drink.

One night she asked the innkeeper to hold her wig for her, because she'd had her wig done and she didn't want her hair to get messed up. She got in a fight with one of the gals that worked there. Oh my God, she rips her wig off.

They had a display of candy out in the front lobby at the Holiday Inn. Where the restroom part is now, that was our bar. That was the Red Fox Tavern. She got in a fight with somebody else out there too. Oh my God, she was something else.

That's one thing—I never fought. I wasn't a fighter. I probably held her wig.

On the way to Las Vegas, we stopped to eat breakfast down in Lake Mills. We got as far as Lake Mills and had breakfast.

Bob said, "We just got on the road."

Of course, we didn't even have air conditioning in the car then. The next time we went, he had bought one of the first air conditioners for a vehicle. It was a round tube-like thing, and it was just in the front.

Bob said, "Well, let Avis sit in front for a while," because I was in the back dying in the heat. I had to get my head up there to get some air conditioning.

And Bonnie said, "Oh sure, you just want to stick me in the back so you can be up in front with Avey."

When we left Lake Mills, of course we had to take something along, so we bought cinnamon rolls because they were so big and beautiful. Well, she put them in the glove compartment. We found them on the way home. They were hard as a rock.

In Las Vegas, they'd tell me where they were staying. I'd be at my sister's, but later I'd go to their room and knock on the door and just go in. They never locked it. We were at the Travelodge down on the Strip.

Bob said, “Oh boy, the maid’s going to come in here in the morning and say, ‘Boy, they had a good time last night, the three of us.’”

Bob was very quiet, and he didn’t like a lot of people. He worked at the bowling alley. He managed the bowling alley here in Albert Lea, Bob’s Lanes, and then they had their own bowling alley over in Winona.

He’s passed away now. The last time they stayed anywhere, they came to my house. I remember he said he’d make his own breakfast, and he made some oatmeal for himself.

He had cancer of the tongue, like smokers get, and he never had a cigarette in his life. But he worked in all that oil stuff to clean the lanes, and all that secondhand smoke.

Just like my Sherri. I think her nail business—well, I saw a documentary on it just a couple weeks ago. The formaldehyde and all the stuff that she smelled in her house when she did nails for women and men, and in the salon, that could have caused her cancer. We don’t know. I’ll never know, of course.

Ken: I want to finish this interview on a happy favorite note, because I know you so well. This will be, I think, the very last chapter of your storybook. I want you to talk about how much you love Elvis.

Avis: Well, I love Elvis like you wouldn't believe. Here I am, almost 84, and I'm still getting things in my Elvis collection.

I just got some things from my brother and his wife yesterday. His wife—I've never even talked to her on the phone since they've been married. She doesn't talk on the phone or nothing. We don't really even know her. But she always buys me stuff at sales.

For a while, every week I was getting necklaces and bracelets and earrings.

Ken: Tell me about Elvis.

Avis: The first time we went to see his first movie, Sue and I—Sue's the one down in Florida—she left me in my seat. We sat in the front row, and there was a stage where the movie screen was.

She went up there, and she just screamed and hollered, "Elvis! Elvis!"

I was so embarrassed.

Then Bonnie, my good friend, and I went to see Elvis up in St. Paul in '74, I think it was. I can't remember. On the way in, Bonnie said, "Avey, look at this, selling all this junk and getting all that money for it."

On the way out, she bought $35 worth of Elvis stuff. I bought a $2 Elvis button, and somebody stole it. I don't know what happened.

I love Elvis, and I love his songs. The latest thing I got was a DVD, and it's got three hours of Elvis singing his gospel songs. I don't think it had ever been opened.

I got a big soup cup too. I was going to show you guys today. I had it along, and I was going to say, "Now you think I like coffee? Look at that."

I got a Christmas ornament, and he's on a Harley motorcycle. I have two throws that I got from my brother and his wife, Todd and Donna. One has full Elvis in the white outfit, the outfit he had on when we saw him in St. Paul. Then there's one underneath of just the bust of him.

When people come, they go, "Well, can we sit there?"

And I say, "Yes. You just sit on Elvis's lap and tell everybody you sat on Elvis's lap."

I also have a letter from his wife Priscilla and their girl Lisa Marie.

My Sherri made me a sweatshirt with the sparklies and everything, with Elvis on it. It says "Graceland" on it. She made me a bag with Elvis on it too, with sparkles.

When Sherri was up here, we went by Graceland Cemetery in Albert Lea. We covered up the "cemetery" part with the sweatshirt she had done for me, the one with Elvis on it, and the bag. She took

my picture there. And my Trevor, in his judo outfit, took a picture in front of that sign too.

It just said “Graceland.”

So I sent that picture to Lisa Marie and Priscilla, and I got a letter back thanking me for being such a faithful Elvis fan.

My MEMORIES

In this scrapbook lives
pieces of my forever

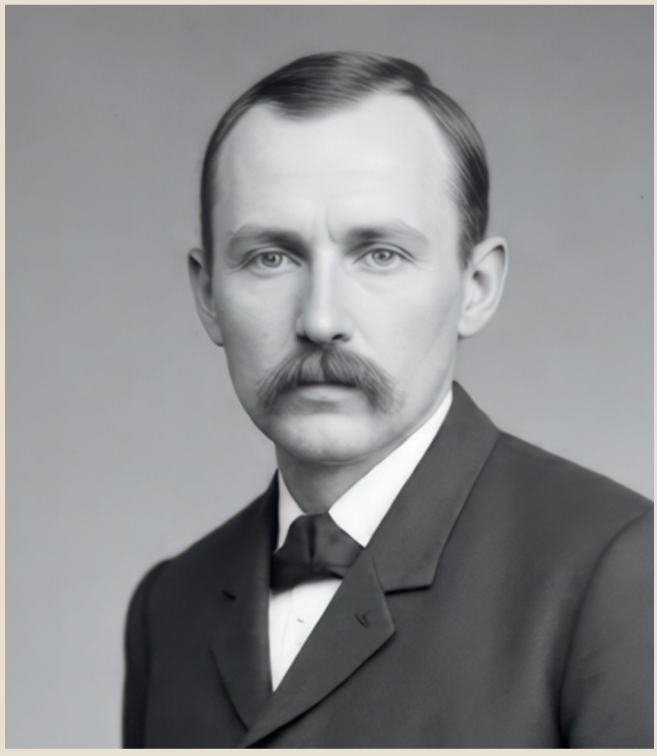
GRANDMA & GRANDPA

Bergene Oftedahl

Henry C Pickel

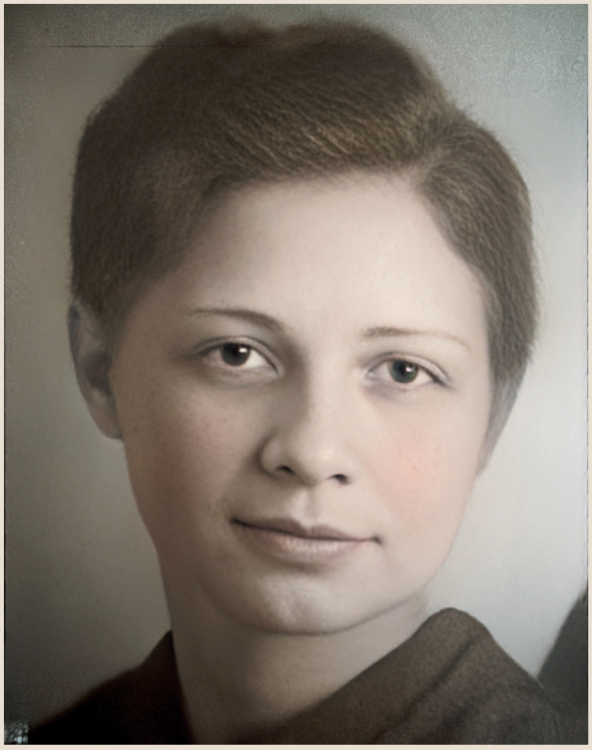
GRANDMA & GRANDPA

Bertha Stelter



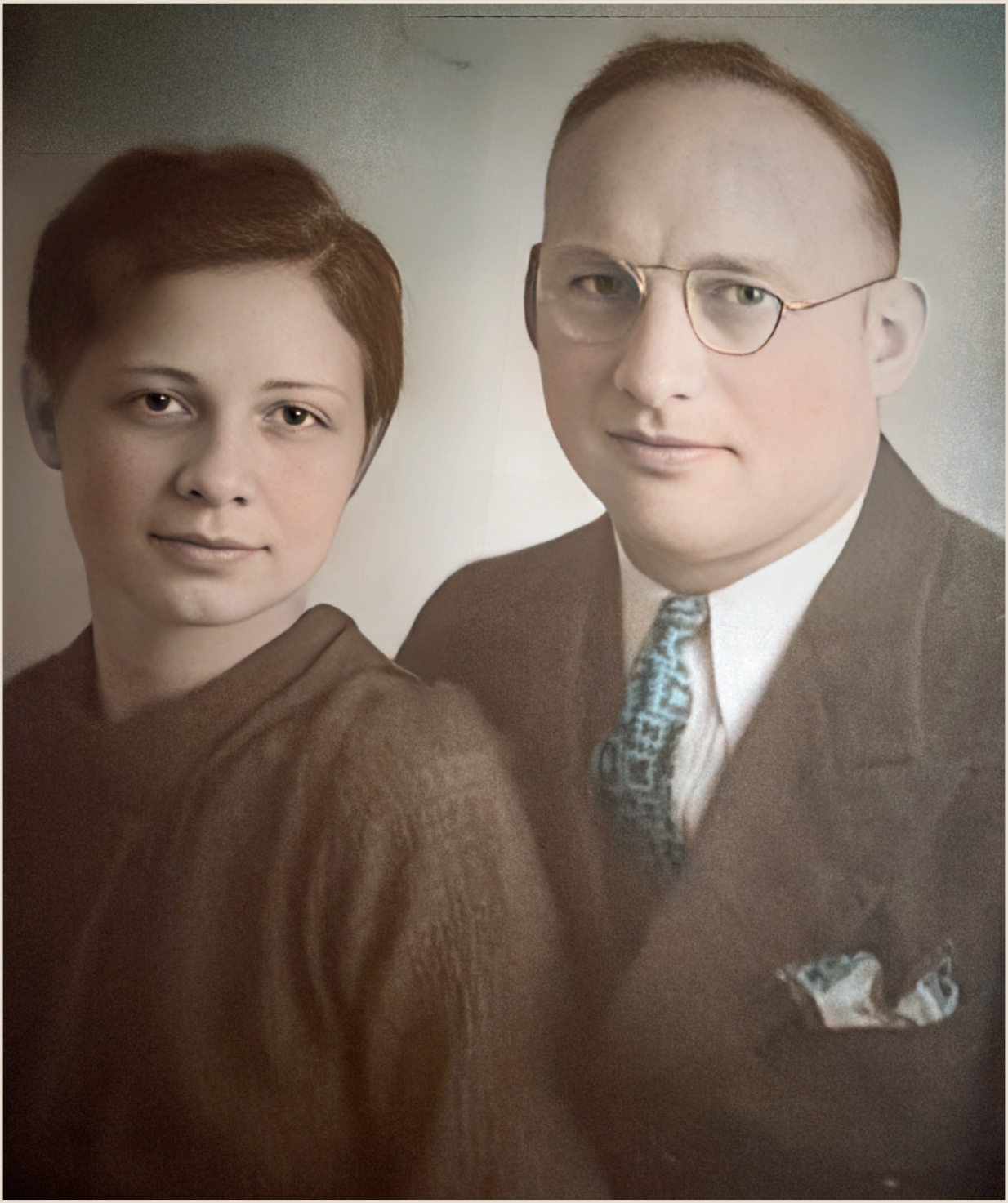
William Julius Baumgardt

William Julius Baumgardt
& Bertha Stelter



Mom

Dad



Mom & Dad

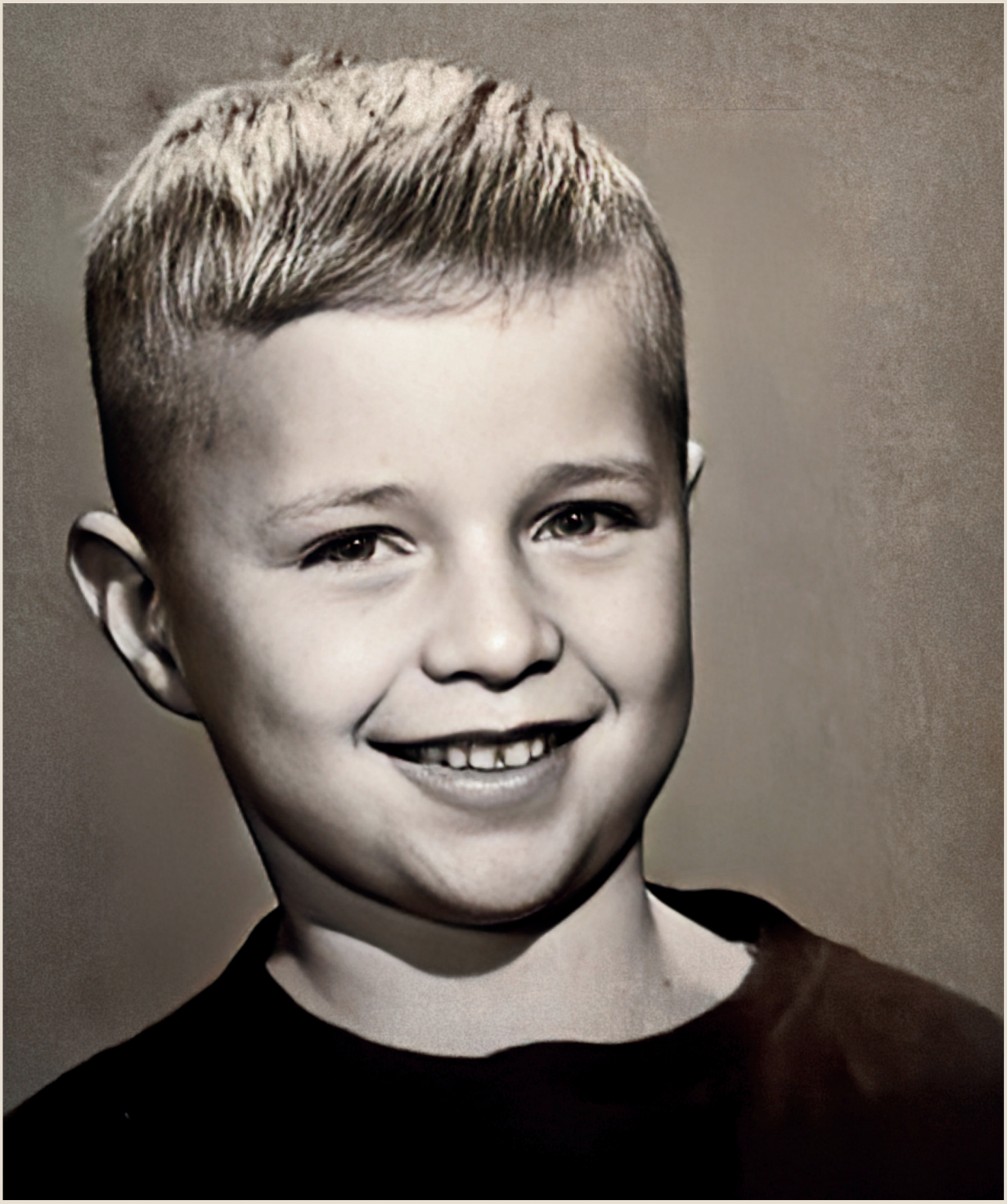
Carley Delilah Pickel

Gayle, Avis, Tedd, Todd

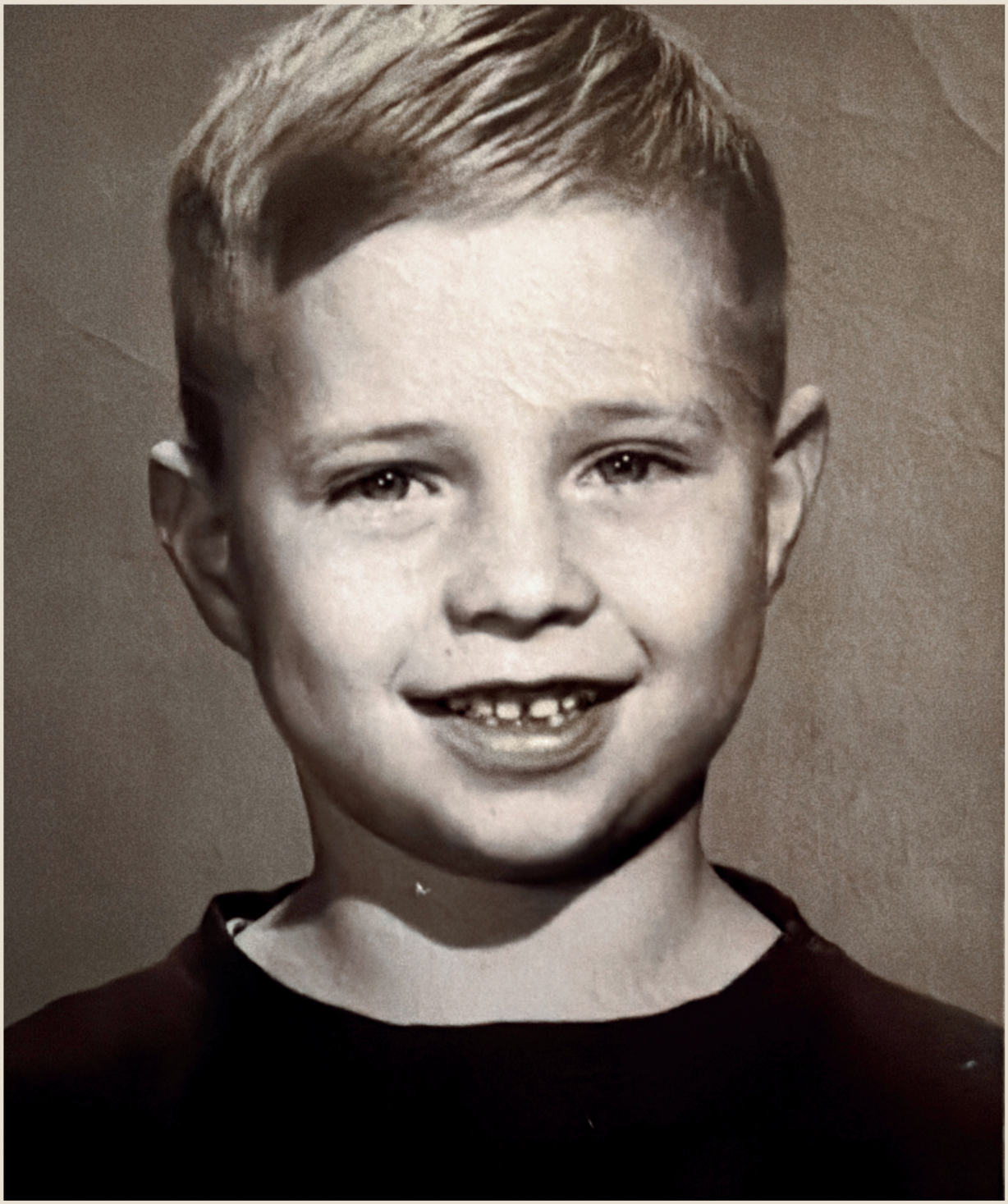
Gayle & Avis

Gayle Lynette

Avis - Confirmation



Tedd



Todd

Tedd & Todd

Gayle, Todd, Carley Delilah & Avis

Gayle & Bob

Todd & Donna

Todd, Avis, Gayle

Tricia Lynn

Sherri Rae

Bruce Michael

Carley Delilah

Sherri Rae and
Carley Delilah

Tricia Lynn, Avis, Bruce, Sherri Rae

Back row, left to right: Sherri Rae, Avis, Tricia
Front row, left to right: Bruce Lutz with Katie and Erik, Tasia, Trevor Wayne

Bruce & Cheryl

Bruce, Cheryl, and the kids

YAY!

Avis, Trevor & Chelsey

Lee, Lyla & Tasia

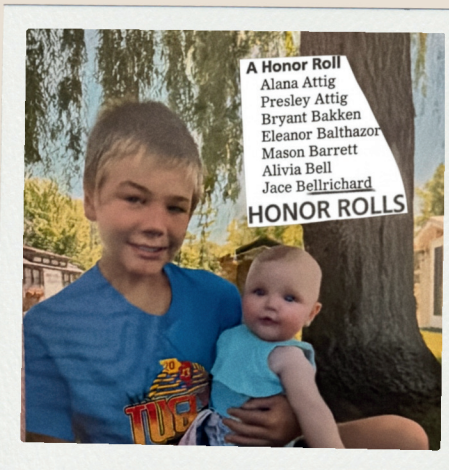
Lyla, Penelope, Jace

Baby Tasia, Avis &
Carley Delilah

My blessings

Dalton & Trevor

Penelope & Dahlia



Jace & Dahlia

More blessings

Brian

Sherri Rae & Dalton

Katie in my old tap dancing costume

Cuteness

Me (yes, I was a toddler once too!)

Brian

Erik

Me and...

Tasia

Dalton

Dalton all grown up

Me with...

Sherri Rae

Bonnie

Santa

Europe

My brother Todd paid for Gayle & I to go to Europe with him.
He is the world's best brother!

I was cute,

and sometimes trouble!

I was so happy this day!

In every laugh, every hug, every step —
we found each other.

Add more...

Online Archives

Here are the links to the audio recordings that Avis made. They are archived in StoryCorps.

Parents & Grandparents
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/my-grandparents-and-parents/

Growing Up
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/childhood-through-first-marriage/

Young Mother
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/early-years-of-marriage/

Vegas
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/my-time-in-vegas/

Church
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/when-i-joined-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints/

Tricia Lynn
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/tricia-lynn-lutz/

Sherri Rae
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/my-sherri-rae

Bruce Michael
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/brian-william-lutz/
(The publisher used the wrong middle name in the link. Apologies.)

Trips
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/trips-ive-taken/

Random Questions
https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/random-questions-4/

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